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THE ALTON SERMONS

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THE

ALTON SERMONS

BY

AUGUSTUS W. HARE

W. ISBISTER & CO.
56, LUDGATE HILL, LONDON
1874

100. g. 378.



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TO

THE INHABITANTS

OF ALTON BARNES, AND ALTON PRIORS,

These Sermons are Dedicated,

ACCORDING TO THE DESIRE

OF THEIR LATE AFFECTIONATE MINISTER,

WHOSE DYING PRAYERS,

THOUGH HE WAS ABSENT FROM THEM IN THE

BODY,

WERE OFFERED UP

FOR HIS BELOVED PEOPLE.



PREFACE.

THIS collection contains those Sermons of Augustus William Hare which were especially connected with his brief ministerial life amid his beloved people of Alton-Barnes. With an almost more than parental interest both in their spiritual and temporal concerns, he there strove, in his tiny village church, to impress the truths of a loving, large-hearted Christianity upon the souls of his parishioners, and there his words are still treasured, with his memory, by the shepherds and poor working-women who heard them. After his death "The Alton Sermons" obtained, through many editions, a notoriety he had little sought or anticipated; but in later years they have been comparatively forgotten, and it has been suggested that those who are only acquainted with them through "The Memorials of a Quiet Life" may be glad to receive them in the accompanying volume.

HOLMHURST, *November*, 1873.

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I.

THE PREACHER'S BLESSING;

OR,

THE HAPPY NEW YEAR.

NUMBERS vi. 22—26.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

SUCH, my brethren, was the blessing which Aaron and his successors, the Jewish priests, were to pronounce by the Lord's appointment over the people of God; and I know no words of pious greeting better suited to this day. New Year's Day so seldom falls on a Sunday, that, when it does, it would be a pity to let it slip, without wishing you all a happy new year, according to the good old English custom. But, as Jesus Christ once said to his disciples, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you,"—meaning that his gifts are very different from those of the world,—so it becomes the minister of Jesus Christ to say to you on this occasion, "Not as the world wisheth, wish I unto you;" meaning thereby, that the happiness he wishes for you is something very different from what the world commonly esteems such.

The world's notion of happiness, and the gospel notion of happiness, are very different; and therefore the world's wishes for your happiness, and the preacher's wishes for your happiness, must be very different also. The world, when it wishes a man happiness, means a long life, and strong health, and plenty of money, and a good name, and a thriving family. The preacher, on the other hand, when he wishes you happiness, as I wish you all now, means something very different thereby. What! (you will perhaps ask,) do I not then wish you life and riches? Yes, my dear brethren, I wish you, and pray God to give you these things, and far more abundantly than the world can wish them for you,—even a life without end, and an inheritance more to be desired than gold, a crown eternal in the heavens. These are the wishes of the preacher, these are his prayers in your behalf,—everlasting life and everlasting glory after your departure out of this world; and, during your stay on earth, a sound body, a healthy soul, a name in the Book of Life, and a household affectionate and dutiful, lovers of God and his will. Such is the difference between the good wishes of the world, and the good wishes of the preacher. The world's good wishes are like itself, worldly: they look chiefly to the body: they reach not beyond earth, and the things of earth. Whereas the good wishes of the preacher are chiefly for your souls: he looks, and by his office is bound to look, first to the one thing needful: his desires for your welfare are guided by the gospel, and like that would raise you up to heaven. Even with regard to this world, the preacher knows full well, that the greatest happiness we can any of us enjoy, is a peaceful mind, a quiet conscience, the feeling that God is reconciled to us, and loves us, and cares for us, and watches over us, and will so order and arrange whatever may befall us, that all things shall work together for our good.

These are the very best gifts,—they are the truest good which any man can have in this life: and they are all contained in the text. Therefore, what the Jewish priests were commanded to say to their people at seasons of joy and blessing, the same words do I now utter as a New Year's prayer for the whole of my parishioners and my people. To every one of you, my friends, I say in the words of Moses: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." This is my prayer in your behalf. May each of you, young and old, male and female, master and servant, may each of you take the words home to your hearts! and may God Almighty hear them, and bring them all to pass, to your great and endless good!

But let us look at the text a little in detail; and let us keep in mind, that this solemn blessing was of God's own appointment; so that we may expect to find mention of all those things which he knows to be best for his people. The first words are, "The Lord bless thee!" that is, the Lord give thee every good gift, and pour down on thee in due abundance whatsoever is wholesome and profitable, for thy soul first, and also for thy body. "The Lord keep thee!" that is, the Lord watch over thee for good, and shield thee from every kind of evil. Here we have already prayed for everything that is good for you; and have called on the Almighty (think of that word) to guard you against your enemies of every kind, and to defend you from all sorts of dangers. Is not this enough? Can we wish for anything more? We perhaps might have thought it enough; but God in his bounty does not. At least he is pleased to show forth the overflowings of his loving-kindness by heaping blessing upon blessing. The text goes on thus:—"The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious to

thee." You all know the difference of feel between a sunshiny and a cloudy day. The real heat may be the same; nay, the cloudy may be warmer than the sunshiny: for we often have bright sunshine in the clear frosty days of winter, and heavy clouds in the middle of summer. But though the real heat may be the same on both days,—though the thermometer, as it is called, or the glass which measures heat, may tell us that the cloudy day is the warmer of the two,—yet to our feelings it may be quite the contrary. There is something so enlivening in the sun, that I have often known persons come in from a walk on a bright winter's day, and speak of it as very pleasant; while the same persons, on a damp cloudy evening in July, would be the first to shiver, and to wish for a fire. Now the difference which it makes to a man's body, whether the sun is shining upon him, the same difference does it make to his soul, whether God's face is shining on him or not. Let God's face shine on the soul, it walks in the brightest sunshine: let God veil his face, and cloud it over, the soul seems chilled and is discomforted. Thus it is written, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." (Psalm xxx. 7.)

Think not, my brethren, that this is a small blessing. I said that we often feel the cold on a sunshiny day in winter less than on a cloudy day in summer. Now is not something answering to this often met with in the world? Do we not see many a man disquieted and ill at ease in the midst of riches and luxuries; while his poor neighbour, who lives in some sorry hovel, may look always cheerful and contented? What is this difference owing to? Not to the health and strength of the poor man: for he may be old, and often a sufferer from cold and wet; and he cannot afford to buy himself the little comforts suited to his years and infirmities. The rich man, on the other hand, may still be young: his disease, if it can be called one, is more

of the mind than of the body: he can consult the best physicians: he can travel from place to place in search of pleasure: he is not forced to deny himself any one earthly thing that may tend to his ease and enjoyment. Yet with all this, in spite of his youth and riches, in spite of his having no outward ailment, and possessing every comfort and luxury that heart could wish for, he may be always growling and grumbling; while the dweller in the old hovel, with the pinching frost of poverty and age, and sometimes sickness to boot, sharp upon him, may be ever making the best of his condition, and finding out something in it to thank God for. This is no mere dream of what might be. Those who see much of the rich and of the poor, may find instances of discontented rich men, and contented poor men, in every part of the land. What then is this difference owing to? To what cause must we trace the gloomy spirit of the one, who has every worldly good to satisfy him, and the blithe-hearted contentedness of the other, whose lot in the world's eye is so hard and wretched? The cause is simply this, that the poor man I have been speaking of,—for what I have said is true only of such,—has led a Christian life, or at least has turned to God in earnest, and repented of his sins betimes; and so God has allowed his face to shine upon him and to cheer him: while his rich neighbour has been led astray by the deceitfulness of riches, and has been so taken up with his pleasures, or with the cares which riches bring with them, that he could not spare time to think about God. He has turned his face away from God: therefore God has turned away his face from him, and left him in clouds and heaviness. O my brethren! that you might but know and feel the joy and gladness which the light of God's face can shed on the soul of the Christian! Wherever it shines, it cheers and warms, and even gilds and beautifies the lowest and meanest lot.

Where it is wanting, earthly wealth and grandeur can no more make amends for it, than the blaze of lamps and the glare of torches could have made amends for the absence of the sun during those three days of Egyptian darkness, when the people, who had disobeyed the voice of the Lord, were plagued with that thick darkness which, Moses tells us, "could be felt."

The next blessing we come to is, "The Lord be gracious to thee!" that is, the Lord receive thy prayers, and hearken to them, as a kind and merciful king hearkens to the petitions of his subjects. That this is one of the things meant by "being gracious," we know from a passage in the Book of Exodus (xxii. 27), where God says of himself, "When the poor man crieth to me, I will hear; for I am gracious." Here the graciousness of God is declared to consist in his hearing prayer. But God is also called gracious in Scripture, because he forgives sin. Thus, in the Book of Nehemiah (ix. 17), we find him called "a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." In the Book of Jonah (iv. 2), the prophet says, "I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." Again in the 77th Psalm, where David for a time is almost tempted to despair of God's forgiveness, after saying, "Will the Lord absent himself for ever? and will he be no more entreated? Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" he adds, "hath God forgotten to be gracious?" To pray then that God will be gracious to his people, is to pray that he will listen to your supplications, and grant your requests; that he will be slow to mark what you have done amiss, and ready to take you into favour, when you forsake your sins, and cry to him for pardon.

The next blessing wished for you in the text is, "The Lord lift up his countenance upon you!" that is, the Lord

shew forth his favour and love toward you. We may suppose this expression taken from a king sitting on the throne, and looking with eyes of such goodwill on the petitioners who come before him, that the bystanders perceive, and the petitioners themselves feel, that he is their friend: they feel that they have the happiness of being esteemed and loved by him, and that they can reckon with certainty on his protection. To be countenanced thus by the King of kings, to feel that he lets us freely into his presence, to know that we have found favour in his sight, and that he has held out his golden sceptre to us, as King Ahasuerus held his sceptre out to Esther, when she presented herself before him,—this assuredly is the highest privilege a son of Adam can enjoy. It is true, God does not really sit, like an eastern king, on a visible throne: for he dwells in glory unapproachable, and in light which no eye can pierce. Nor does he really lift up his head, or hold out a golden sceptre. But a child may understand, that, when such things are said of God, it is for the purpose of bringing what is declared concerning him to the level of our poor weak minds. Were heavenly things spoken of after a heavenly manner, how could we creeping earth-worms lift up our thoughts to conceive them? Therefore it has pleased God in Holy Writ to speak of himself in words and images borrowed from earthly things, so that we may form some notions, however dim, and gain some knowledge, however scanty, of his infinite power and goodness. Thus in some places of Scripture God is called a king, in others a father. Not that he is like an earthly king, or an earthly father. But we all know what a king is, and what a father is: therefore, in compassion to our ignorance, God suffers himself to be thus spoken of, that we may in some measure understand what duty and obedience and love we owe to him, and what protection and blessings and mercy we may hope for from

him. So again we read in Scripture of God's hands, and God's eyes. Not that God, who is a spirit, has hands and eyes, as we have: but this is said, to warn us that he sees and knows our most secret actions, just as if he had eyes to see them with, and that he can punish us for our sins, and smite us down, just as if he had a strong right hand. You must not be surprised therefore by the expressions, "The Lord make his face shine upon thee," and "lift up his countenance upon thee." For these things too are said in compassion to our weakness, to teach us that God's favour is as cheering to the soul as sunshine to the body; and that they who are reconciled to him, and are living in his love, have the same quiet trust that no harm can happen to them, as you and I should have, if we knew ourselves to be countenanced and befriended by the king. If we had the king's countenance, if he had looked favourably upon us, and assured us of his friendship, we should expect to receive some honour or preferment; or at least we should feel certain that, so far as he could hinder, he would not suffer any one to hurt us. So is it with those who have God's countenance, but in a far, far higher degree. For the king, great as he is, is only a man. His power is cut short in a thousand ways, and at the best can only follow us to the grave. When dust to dust is thrown upon our coffins, we are beyond the sway of every earthly prince. But God is the King of kings: his power has no bounds, except his own wisdom and goodness and will: whatever he pleases to do, he can do: above all, in the grave, where human rule is at an end, his rule and sovereignty are doubled. Here he leaves us in great measure to our own devices: he governs us by human means: he rules us by viceroys and stewards. But the moment the soul leaves the body, it passes into his immediate kingdom: it goes to a place where the government is given in charge, not to any earthly prince, but to

the only-begotten Son; who there reigns and judges in person with a boundless power to punish and to reward. My brethren, the friendship and protection of the King of kings is surely well worth having. May he vouchsafe, as the Psalmist expresses it, to "give us everlasting felicity, and to make us glad with the joy of his countenance!" (Psalm xxi. 6.)

Since God however does not really sit like a king upon a throne, nor show himself to man face to face, how are we to know whether his countenance has been lifted upon us? The last blessing mentioned in the text will furnish an answer to this question: "The Lord give thee peace!" For peace is the fruit of God's favour. He who is at peace, and feels himself at peace with God, he who knows himself to be reconciled to his heavenly Father through the sufferings and merits of Jesus Christ, he who knows that he has been admitted and adopted into Christ's family, and feels that obedient reverence and love toward God, which every true son must feel for the best of fathers,—such a person may be quite sure that God has indeed lifted up his countenance upon him. "The effect of righteousness," in both senses of the word,—the effect of justification by faith in the blood of Christ, and of our thereupon living a good and christian life, both of which things in Scripture are often termed righteousness,—the effect of this righteousness, the prophet Isaiah says, "is peace." If we know we are forgiven for Christ's sake, we are at peace; because we know that nothing can hurt us. If, out of gratitude and love to our Master and Saviour, we are living in obedience to his holy laws, then too we have every ground and reason to be at peace: for, "If we are followers of that which is good, who is he that will harm us?" (1 Peter iii. 13.)

Here I should conclude, but for one caution most needful

to be given. Some may think, that, because they are at peace, because their conscience does not prick or pain them, therefore all must be well with them. My brethren, it is not every sort of peace that is to be desired, but only that true peace which is the effect of righteousness. There is a false peace, a peace arising out of recklessness and carelessness and the never thinking about God. Let me warn you against this false peace. Would you say that a man was at peace, who was dropping into a deadly slumber? Would you say that Samson was at peace, when he lay sleeping in the lap of Delilah? Such, so dangerous, so deadly is,—the peace shall I call it? or rather, the false security of the self-righteous and the careless.

Rouse yourselves, I beseech you, from such fatal slumbers, if any of you have hitherto been sinking beneath them. Awake! the flames of the fiery lake are flashing in your eyes; and you see them not, but are sliding sleep-bound toward them. Awake! behold, the face of the Lord does not shine, but frown upon you. Any fear, any woe, any sting of conscience, will be a blessing to you, which can save you from the wrath of a disregarded and offended God. As the old year has fallen into its grave, and the new year has just opened its eyes to the light of this morning's sun, so let the days of your ungodliness have come to an end, and let this be the first day of a new year of godly fear and hope. This is my prayer for you: this is my new year's blessing. I cannot wish you peace yet. Your false dead peace must be broken up—the crust of ice which covers your hearts must be broken up, before the waters can flow gently and calmly, brightened by the sunshine of heaven.

My brethren, you can now understand a little better, how precious was the blessing which the priest of God among the Jews called down upon the people of God. Let me

repeat the words again, as I do from my heart: my brethren, the Lord bless you this year, and keep you! the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, now and evermore!

II.

GRACE, PEACE, AND KNOWLEDGE.

2 PETER i. 2.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

OF the twenty-one epistles handed down to us in the New Testament, nineteen,—all but two,—open with a prayer for the spiritual well-being of the persons to whom they are addressed. Before the apostles enter on their task of exhortation and instruction, they begin by wishing their brethren in Christ the choicest spiritual blessings; and in sixteen of the epistles these blessings are grace and peace. Grace and peace then must be something very precious, seeing that they were the thoughts thus uppermost in the minds of the apostles, the very first thoughts to strike them when they sat down to write, and among the first words to drop from their pen. And precious, most precious blessings indeed they are, my brethren. For what do they amount to? what is the meaning of these two holy, apostolical words? To begin with the first: grace means favour. To shew grace is to shew favour. To be in a person's good graces is to be in favour with him. An act of grace is an act of favour, of that favour which springs from mercy and love, and which gives or forgives a man more than in

justice he has any right to look for. Thus we read that "Joseph found grace (that is, found favour) in the sight of Potiphar." But in the New Testament grace is hardly ever used except in speaking of God, and things of God: and it either means the favour and mercy and love of God, or some gift bestowed on man by that favour and mercy and love: above all, that greatest and most precious of all gifts, the gift of his only-begotten Son, the forgiveness of our sins purchased for us by his blood, and the promise of eternal life, if we will turn to him, and believe in him, and obey him. This too is more especially called the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, with a petition for which, you know, the minister winds up the service. In the text we may perhaps give the word a somewhat wider sense, and take it to stand generally for God's love and favour towards all the true followers of Christ.

Moreover, as grace in the text is the grace and favour of God, so peace in the text is that inward spiritual peace, which springs out of God's grace and favour, and which is the greatest of all the blessings it is possible for man to enjoy. Not that peace of other kinds is to be slighted. Peace from foreign enemies, peace from strife and broils in our own land, peace and harmony among neighbours, peace and love in a family,—all these things are blessings to be thankful for, when we have them, and to be prayed for, when we have them not. Again, peace in the Church would be another great blessing: and this too is to be prayed for, that it may please God to heal those divisions and quarrels among Christians, sect against sect, and party against party, which give rise to so much scandal, and are such a handle to the profane. "We see (say they) that even those who take the most thought about religion, cannot be of one mind in it: why then should we set foot in a road where there is so much jangling and jostling?"

Thus talk, and thus think, the profane. And doubtless, could peace and unity be restored to the Church of Christ, were the day to come when "Ephraim shall no more envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim" (Isaiah xi. 13), could the world see the great and glorious sight of Christians holding the same faith, agreeing in the same doctrines, joining in the same worship, and walking along the same path in peace and love, as brethren and partners in one hope ought to do,—doubtless such a living proof of the peacefulness and excellency of Christ's kingdom would bring in many to the truth, who at present have deserted its banner, and enlisted on the side of its enemies. But, though peace in the Church, and all other outward peace, is a great blessing, and though the peace which St. Peter desires to see multiplied amongst us, would turn the whole earth into a garden for every kind of peace to flourish in, still it is clear that the peace he has mainly in view is the spiritual peace which arises out of the favour of God. For so grace and peace stand naturally together; and peace follows grace, and flows from it, and grows out of it, as a stream flows from a spring, and as a blossom grows from a tree;—both to come to us "through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord."

Peace, I say, inward peace, peace of mind, peace of conscience, flows and grows out of God's grace: and this is the only source, the only root, from which it can spring. For think a little: how should we stand toward God, supposing Christ had never come into the world? or supposing that, now he is come, he had not reconciled us to the Father? God is almighty, and can deal with us according to his will: he has given us just and holy laws: and those laws we have broken again and again in every possible way. There is no man living so good as he ought to be: there is no man living so good as he might

well have been, considering his opportunities and advantages: there is no man living who has not done wrong, wrong in the face and against the law of God, when he might, had he pleased, have done right; no man who has not done what at the time he well knew to be wrong, and who has not failed in doing what he knew he ought to have done. How then can any man, whose heart has ever warned him, or who has ever been warned of these things, —how can such a man be at peace? When Jehu was asked by the king of Israel, "Is it peace, Jehu?" he answered, "What peace, so long as the idolatries of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" (2 Kings ix. 22.) In like manner when a person, who has been awakened to a sense of his duty and of his sins, says to his conscience, "Is it peace, Conscience?" his conscience makes answer, "What peace, thou sinner! when the witchcrafts of that Jezebel within thee, that carnal heart of thine, and its abominations and idolatries are so many; when thou hast preferred the world and the things of the world, the flesh and the things of the flesh,—nay, when thou hast even preferred those hell-sprung passions, envy, and hatred, and malice, and revenge, to the law of God; when thou hast made an idol of thyself, and set up thine own will to be the rule and principle of thy thoughts and actions,—having lived thus, O sinner! what room can there be for peace?" Such must be, such has ever been, the answer of the conscience, when men come to it in search of that inward peace, which always shrinks and flees from every kind of guilt, whether great or small.

But if a man's conscience will not allow him to have peace, whither shall he betake himself to find it? Shall he go to his natural reason, to that reason by which the affairs of mankind in this world are ordered and controlled? That will tell him, that, according to the laws of man,

every offence has its set punishment. It is no excuse for a person who has broken any one law, that he has kept fifty others. When a man is tried for a robbery, it is of no avail for him to plead that he has never murdered anybody; nor, if he is tried for stealing, that he is not a highway-robber; nor, if he is tried for a riot, that he is not a thief; nor, if he is tried for poaching, that he is not a rioter. A man is bound to keep all the laws. If he breaks any one of them, and is found out, he may be brought to punishment: nay, he is sure of meeting with it, unless from something out of the common way, such as his youth, or the pettiness of the injury, or its being a first offence, he is lucky enough to get a pardon. But can any one say, he never offended God, except when he was very young and knew no better? Can any one say, he has offended God only once, and in some small matter? If there be such a person, natural reason might perhaps encourage him to look for pardon at God's hands. But we all know, there is no such person in the world, nor ever was. We all know, if we know anything about the matter, that in many ways, and at every season of life, in childhood, in boyhood, in youth, in manhood, in old age, all have offended, and all are still offending God; some of us more indeed, and some less, but all frequently and all grievously and inexcusably. We know that every man has broken God's law, knowingly and wilfully, over and over again. That law too is a perfect law: and the lawgiver is one whom there is no deceiving or escaping. What peace then can reason bestow? Its sentence must be, Thou hast broken the law; therefore thou must abide the penalty of the law.

But perhaps some one, after being thus baffled by his conscience and his reason, may think of turning to the Old Testament, to see whether he can find comfort there. Well! what does he read? He reads, "Cursed is every one that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them."

(Deut. xxvii. 26.) So that we must do them all: else we are accursed. If we do not keep them all, if we sin against them, then we read this plain sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. xviii. 20.)

Here then we have the sinner, when he becomes aware of his guilt,—and when I say the sinner, I mean you, I mean all, for all are sinners,—going for hope, for comfort, for peace, to conscience and reason: but he gets no hope, or comfort, or peace from them. Conscience tells him, "I have no peace to give thee, because I know thee to be a sinner." Reason tells him, "I have no peace to give thee, because thou hast broken the law; and he who breaketh the law, shall be broken by the law." And if, in the hope of getting a milder answer, he takes up the Old Testament, he there finds many offers of pardon, it is true, and many promises of mercy; but he also finds the most terrible threats against every kind of iniquity: he finds story after story of God's fearful judgments against sinners: above all, he finds a covenant of works too perfect for man to keep: and he reads those words so appalling to a sinner, who is seeking after peace—"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." How then is he to find peace? He cannot find it for himself: nothing on earth can give it him; he must receive it therefore from above; it must come to him as a free gift from God. That is, it must come to him by grace. If God is graciously pleased to offer us his free pardon, and to take us back into his favour, then, and then alone, can we have peace.

Now this way to peace has been opened to us by God's free mercy and grace. When we were yet afar off, nay, before we had ever thought of turning to him, while we were loitering in the fields, among the swine, feeding on the husks of sin and folly, God himself, in the person of his only Son, came to us, to look for us, and to fetch us home

again, and brought us the angel food of truth and holiness, that, having tasted thereof, we might loathe the wretched fare we had till then been feeding on. By this shewing forth of God's great love for us, by this proof that he wishes us to be reconciled to him, by this precious pledge that he longs to pardon us, if we will only let him, the sinner is enabled to find peace. The moment we are sure of being forgiven, our spirits may throw aside their griefs, and fly back to God, and find rest in a humble trust in his mercy; seeing that we may now have a good and certain hope, that God will not leave his work imperfect; that he, who has begun our salvation, will carry it on to the end; that he, who has given us his only Son to die for us, will with him freely give us all things, which make for the good of our souls. Thus, as an excellent old writer says, "the flower of peace grows upon the root of grace." *

"This persuasion," he continues, "has such a gentle power with it, that it can make our minds clear and bright, like the finest day in summer. 'My peace I give to you,' says Christ, 'let not your hearts be troubled.' All the peace and favour of the world cannot calm a troubled heart; but where this peace is, which Christ gives, all the trouble and disquiet of this world cannot disturb it." † Have any of you happened to see the effect of a breeze on a pool of deep water in a sheltered valley? The wind may be sharp enough to ruffle the face of the water for a while; but its depths are at peace. So is it with the Christian. The cares and worries of life cannot pierce below the surface of his spirit: for he is lying beneath the shelter of his Saviour; and so the depths of his heart are safe from every common trouble and annoyance. Nothing earthly can shake his soul, unless it be one of those heavy storms and whirlwinds

* Leighton, vol. i. p. 28. † Ibid., p. 30.

of affliction, with which it sometimes pleases God to try the patience of his servants. But God never tasks his children beyond their power; so that when he tries them with some heart-searching grief, he at the same time sends them strength to bear it. Apart however from these heavy heart-searching woes, which befall us, God be praised, very rarely, the Christian enjoys great peace. To a mind like his, a mind at ease in itself, and feeding on the promises of its God and Saviour, what matter those outward grievances and distresses, which harass and trouble the children of this world? Truly they are little more to him, than the rattling of the hail on the tiles to a man sitting by a good fire with a plentiful meal before him.* If the man takes notice of the storm out of doors, it is only to say how glad he is to be out of it. So, if the Christian notices those cares and crosses, which his worldly neighbours make so much of, it is only to thank God for having called him to a covert from the gales of life, and placed him in a safe and sheltered haven.

What then makes so many people take up such a dislike to religion, as if it were a sour and unpleasant thing? It is because they see the temperance and the self-denial of the true Christian: they see that he shrinks from every kind of revelry and excess: they see that his very mirth has something quiet and sober in it: and seeing all this, they say within themselves, "What a poor dull wretched fellow this must be! I would not be like him for the world." This is strange language, is it not, for anybody to hold about a Christian? For every thinking man must know that a true Christian is the child and heir of God. A true Christian is approved by the Father; a true Christian is loved by the Son; a true Christian has been sanctified by the Holy Ghost; hereafter he will be the companion of angels; and

* Leighton, vol. i. p. 30.

even now his heart is more than half in heaven. For a sinner to speak scornfully of such a person, for a sinner to say of God's servant and child, "I would not be like him for the world,"—is surely very strange and foolish talk. Yet how often do we hear such talk! How often do we see the sinner, perched on the dunghill of his vices, clapping his wings in self-applause, and fancying himself a much grander creature than the poor Christian, who all the while is soaring on high like a lark, and mounting on his way to heaven! Foolish, however, and worse than foolish as it is, for sinners to despise a Christian, it is not altogether to be wondered at that they should sometimes think his lot dull and wretched. For they can only judge by the outside; they cannot look within: they cannot see the inward joy, the gladness of heart, which the true Christian is seldom without, even when in a very hard and low estate. The sinner cannot see this: nor, if he could, would he be able to fathom it, or make it out; for it is a peace which passeth this world's understanding. Yet it is not a whit the less real, or less delightful; nor does it less fill the heart.

If any of you then have a longing for peace, and put belief in what the Bible tells you, be persuaded to look for peace in the quarter to which I have been pointing you. Make the attempt: it can do you no harm. Give religion a fair trial. Seek for peace in the way of grace, in the way of reconciliation with the Father, in the way of God's love and favour, in the way, the spiritual way, of piety, and meekness, and obedience. This is the true and straight road to peace and happiness; and beside it there is no other. Every other road will end in disappointment. This will lead you to the only happiness which can give a man peace at the last.

But perhaps you may ask me how I know there is no other road to happiness, besides this way of peace. I know

it for two reasons: first from the nature of the thing; because nothing short of God can satisfy an immortal soul; and so long as the soul is unsatisfied, a man cannot be more than half happy. Moreover, the wisest man that ever lived, Solomon, has told us so. He made the trial. He sought for happiness in a thousand ways, and has left us his record that he found them all to be vanity and vexation of spirit. Now, if he, with every luxury, every enjoyment, every indulgence, which gold could buy,—if Solomon, with all his power, all his wisdom, all his glory, all his splendour, all his riches,—if he found life, when away from God, such a poor, vexatious, empty thing, what shall we find it—we, whose utmost worldly pleasures can no more be compared to his, than a cup of muddy ditch-water can be compared to the richest wine? If you wish for happiness then, look for it in the only road that has ever led to it. Seek for God's grace, for God's forgiveness, for God's favour; pray for them; let them into your souls; and when they have come, and taken up their abode with you, peace will not long be a stranger. It will come to you, and make you happy.

Such, my brethren, is the peace which the apostle desires for you in the text. It is a spiritual peace, arising from a sense of God's great favour and mercy. It is an inward peace, shedding balm over the soul, and preserving it from being galled and fretted by the petty rubs of life. But we shall form a faint notion of the apostle's love and christian kindness, unless we consider the measure and degree of his good wishes. It is not enough for him to wish us grace and peace: he prays that the grace and peace may be multiplied. This is indeed blessing us with a good measure of blessings, pressed down, and running over. "Grace and peace be multiplied." Had he been speaking of any earthly blessing, he would have written differently. He would never have wished you to have riches without stint,

or power without stint, or honours without stint. On the contrary, he would have told you, that an abundance of any of these things is the most dangerous trial a man can be put to. Accordingly the wise Agur, in praying against poverty, takes care to pray also against riches. "Give me not riches," he says, "lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" (Prov. xxx. 9.) But in spiritual blessings it is otherwise. Of them there can never be too much. A man can never have too much faith, too much holiness, too much trust in God, too much love for Christ, too much patience, too much humility. Therefore, in speaking of those heavenly blessings, grace and peace, the apostle desires them for us without any stint or limit, saying, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you." Hence we may take a lesson for our own prayers, and learn to ask for earthly things humbly, and with an *if*,—saying, "If it shall please thee, O God, of thy goodness give me so and so. Thou knowest, O Lord, what is best for thy servant, grant me so and so, if it be good for me." This is the way we ought to pray for earthly blessings: for so prayed even Jesus himself. Even he, when crying to the Father, during that agony of his spirit in the garden of Gethsemane, even Jesus, prayed with an *if*,—saying, "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done." Let us follow our Lord's example in this; and when we pray for any earthly blessings, beyond the mere necessaries of life, let us ask for them humbly, and with an *if;* like persons aware of our own ignorance, and who feel that no one can tell what is truly good for a man in this life. But for heavenly blessings pray without an *if*. For about them we do know most certainly, that the more we can get of them the better. Therefore ask for them earnestly and repeatedly. Be not afraid of wearying God by your entreaties. Beg and pray to him for his pardon, for his love, for the

help of his Holy Spirit, like men who long to have what they ask for. Beg and pray to him again and again, that his grace and peace may be multiplied and increased to you, without stint, and without measure. Perhaps your petitions may not be granted the first time, nor the tenth time, nor even the hundredth time. Never mind; pray on the more earnestly, remembering our Saviour's words, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12); that is to say, you may pull down the blessings of the gospel by constant and hearty prayer. St. Paul too bids us "desire spiritual gifts." (1 Cor. xiv. 1.) Be desirous, then—nay, be covetous, be greedy of them. It is the only kind of covetousness and greediness which is praiseworthy, and which is sure to be satisfied in the end. "The lions," we read, that is, those who are like lions, those who are greedy of any kind of earthly prey, "do lack and suffer hunger" (Ps. xxxiv. 10): the more they get, the more they crave; so that they are never satisfied, and never can be. But those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, and grace, and peace, and the other gifts of God and Christ, they are declared by our Saviour to be "blessed, for they shall be filled." Their wishes will be granted; and they will want none of those good things for which they have cried to their Father.

Such is the measure of the grace and peace which the apostle desires for us. He would have them multiplied and increased to us. But how is this increase and multiplying to come to us? It is to come through "the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." If you wish to receive the multiplied grace and peace, which I have shewn you to be so precious, you must seek it through the appointed channel; you must seek it through knowledge, through a spiritual knowledge, through a living knowledge, of God the Father and the Son. There is a knowledge which,

St. Paul tells us, "puffs a man up, and fills him with a vain conceit" of being wiser than his neighbours. This however can never be the knowledge through which grace and peace are to be multiplied. For instance, a man might be able to say by heart all the names in the Bible, all the names of the kings of Israel, all the names of the kings of Judah, all the names of the heads of the families that returned with Nehemiah from Babylon. Yet this knowledge would profit him nothing. It is only a knowledge of the names of men; whereas St. Peter requires a knowledge of God and his Son. Again, a man might be able to tell the number of verses in every chapter all the Bible through; and he might be able to say the first word of every chapter, or even the first word of every verse. Would that knowledge profit him? No. It would only be a knowledge of words and numbers: it would not be a knowledge of God and of his Son. Or a man might be able to explain all the hard words, and to tell the meaning of all the hardest texts in the Bible; and this too, if he knew nothing besides about the Bible, would profit him nothing. It would only be a knowledge of difficulties; it would not be a knowledge of God and of his Son. The knowledge which St. Peter recommends to us in the text, is not a knowledge of words, or names, or numbers; it is not a knowledge of what is curious, or learned, or difficult; but a practical and enlightened knowledge of the truths set before us in the Gospel.

It must be a practical knowledge: because religion is in great measure a practical thing; and practical things are learnt by practice. A man who would learn religion thoroughly, must go through an apprenticeship to it, just as he would to a trade. "If any man will do God's will," said our blessed Lord, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." (John vii. 17.) To the same purpose are David's words: "Come, taste and see how gracious the

Lord is!" (Ps. xxxiv. 8.) The best way of seeing and perceiving the grace of God is to begin by tasting it. This assuredly is the best knowledge that anybody can have of God. He who enjoys this precious knowledge, has the proof of the Gospel in himself. For to him Jesus fulfils the promise, which he made the night before his crucifixion: "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.)

Still, besides this practical knowledge, every one, poor as well as rich, ought also to have an enlightened knowledge of God and of his blessed Son: and Jesus, when he brought down the Gospel from heaven, purposed that so it should be. The Gospel was meant to be a light to the mind of every one, as well as a strength and comfort to the heart of every one. If christian education had been duly established in this country, so it would be. I am afraid in this we are gone backward,—not indeed since our fathers' time,—for teaching the poor is more attended to now, than it was some years ago: but I fear we have gone backward in this matter since the time of our glorious Reformation; and we are only beginning to recover our lost ground. Our forefathers carried on the education of the poor by frequent and diligent catechizing; that is, by questioning them over and over about the great truths and facts and doctrines of Christianity. But now that preaching is looked upon as the great thing in every church, this catechizing or questioning has in many places fallen into disuse; and I think the poor have lost by the change. To profit by a sermon, a man must attend to it: he must hear it thoroughly; he must understand it; he must think it over with himself, when he gets home. How few in any congregation will go to all this trouble! You come, and sit, and hear, and I hope are able in some degree to follow the meaning of what I say to

you from the pulpit: yet how far is this from the understanding and the knowledge by which grace and peace are to be multiplied! But when a person is catechized, when he is asked questions, and called on to answer them, he must think; he must brace up his mind: unless he is determined not to learn, he can scarce help being taught something. And those who want to learn, those who feel a wish to improve, and to grow in the knowledge of their Lord and Master,—what progress must they make under such instruction! When I speak thus of catechizing, do not think I mean to decry preaching. Both are useful in their turns, catechizing to prepare the ground, preaching to crop it. But unless the mind be prepared by catechizing, preaching loses half its use.

Thinking as I do of this practice of catechizing, you will not be surprised that I am very anxious the young among you should not neglect the opportunity of instruction, with which I purpose to furnish them this winter. It would be a shame, if, in so small a parish, I could not contrive means for teaching those who are willing to be taught. In great town parishes, where there are sometimes thousands of souls, a minister, with the best wishes for the welfare of his people, cannot find time to do all he wishes: what is he among so many? But here, where we all live so close together,—here, where one small hamlet,—it is hardly more,—contains all the people under my care, if the poor are not duly trained and brought up in the knowledge of God and of his Son, blame and guilt must needs lie somewhere. God grant it lie not with me! God grant it be not said to me in the last day, "Here is a soul that was committed to your charge: it might have been saved by your watchfulness: you neglected it; and it is lost." But if this would to me be a most sorrowful hearing, so as to embitter, if it were possible, the very joys of heaven, how must it steep

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God to open wider than before a second way to the knowledge of his will, the way of reading. Still there are elderly persons who cannot read; and these should beware of neglecting any opportunity of coming to this place, to hear the word of God.

But children are without excuse, if they do not learn to read, as well as hear. Yes, children, you must learn to read the word of God. When you go to school, above all, when you come to your Sunday-school, do not come as to a task; but come with hearts full of thankfulness to God, for giving you such means of learning the way to heaven. Come with a wish to learn all you can about God and his blessed Son. Do not think it enough, if you learn to spell, and to read, and to say the words of Scripture: but seek to learn the truths of Scripture. Do as the bees do. A bee, when it sees a flower, does not fly round and round it, and sip it, and then off again, like the foolish idle butterflies: it settles on the flower, and sucks the honey out of it. So should you, when you come to one of the beautiful parables which Jesus spake, or to one of the miracles which Jesus did: you should do as the bees do: you should settle your thoughts on what you read, and try to suck the honey out of it. But why do I speak of the parables and miracles? Almost every verse of the New Testament has its honey. Almost every verse contains a spiritual truth fit to nourish some soul or other.

Almost every verse of the New Testament, I say, contains a spiritual truth fit to nourish some soul or other. For though every man has equal need to be nourished by the Bible, yet we do not all require the same spiritual food: nay, we may require one kind of spiritual food to-day, and another kind next year. The old have not the same temptations as the young: the rich have not the same sort of temptations as the poor: the prosperous and happy have

not the same sort of temptations as the sorrowful. But every age, every rank, every condition of life, has its own trials, and its own temptations; and perhaps these temptations may not be the same a couple of weeks together. For this reason the Bible is not a book to be read through once or twice, and then laid by: it must be read and thought upon again and again. The oftener you go to it for counsel and nourishment, the better, the wiser, the stronger, the happier you will become. Go to it then in youth, for such nourishment as youth needs: go to it in manhood and old age, for such nourishment as manhood and old age need. Let me rather say, go to it for your daily bread. Seek in it whatever may be necessary for the present nourishment of your souls: and pray to the Holy Spirit to open your eyes, that you may find that nourishment. And when you have found it, still do as the bees do; hive it; store it up in your memories against the day of trial. Remember, it was by the truth of Scripture, which he had stored up in his memory during youth, that our Saviour himself, when he was tempted in the wilderness, was pleased to baffle the wiles of the devil. If we would beat off Satan, as Jesus did, we must use the same weapon as Jesus used: we must oppose him with the word of God. That word, like the spears which the ancients used to fight with, is at once a weapon and a prop: it has a point to drive away the enemy; it has a staff to support us on our road. Lean on that staff, which is the promises of God: it shall support you, when your heart is ready to sink. Fight with that point, which is the sharp commands of God: and the tempter shall flee before you. So walking, and so fighting, not in your own strength, but in humble reliance upon that Almighty Lord, whose word standeth fast for ever, you shall attain to that knowledge of the Father and the Son, which St. Peter speaks of in the text. You

shall see the Father as he is in himself, pure, and severe, and holy; as he is in his Son, loving, merciful, and forgiving; the man Jesus, patient and obedient,—the incarnate Son, humbling himself out of the purest love,—the same Son, sitting on his Father's judgment-seat, the punisher of all who have shut their hearts against his mercy. This is the knowledge which leads to grace and peace. In proportion as you come to see the Father and his Christ in these their true and heavenly characters, you will grow to feel God's goodness more and more: you will learn to hate sin more and more: you will learn to love God's law, to be meek and spiritually-minded; and these things lead to great peace; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

III.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

2 PETER iii. 18.

Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THESE are the concluding words of the second epistle general of St. Peter. They contain the last advice which that apostle has left to the Church of Christ. For his epistle is not addressed to any particular Church, or to the Christians of any particular age. It is a general epistle to all who have been called to share in the great and precious promises of the gospel. What is said in it, is said to all Christian people, and of course to us among the number. Let us look then on the text, as the parting exhortation bequeathed by St. Peter to us. Let us consider him as saying to us personally, Grow in grace and spiritual knowledge. Do not sit down satisfied with your present progress in religion. Do not fancy you have already attained to that holiness and righteousness which ought to be the mark of Christians. Beware of slumbering or halting on the road. Beware of mistaking words and professions for Christian faith, a decent behaviour for Christian practice, the outward form for the inward spirit. It is not enough for Christ's soldiers to stand their ground, and

maintain their steadfastness: they must press forward and gain more ground. It is not enough for them not to fall from grace: they must make new shoots upwards, and grow in grace; and this can only be done by growing in religious knowledge also.

Such, my brethren, is the purport of St. Peter's farewell charge to us: and surely the last words of so great an apostle must be well deserving of our most serious attention. Let me beg you therefore to give me that attention, while I try to set before you what is meant by growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The grace of God, in its most general sense, stands for his favour and loving-kindness. When we pray for it, we pray God to bestow his favour upon us. But in the New Testament the words are applied more especially to that most wonderful and chiefest instance of God's love, his seeking to save and restore a guilty world through the blood of his Son. Herein, above all, was the grace and goodness of God displayed to us in its whole fulness,—in that, when we had strayed from God, God sent his own Son to lead us back to him,—in that, when expiation and atonement for sin were required by his justice and holiness, the Lamb of God came and offered up himself as a sacrifice in our stead, —in that, to give us a new heart, a heart capable of loving and obeying the Father, the holy and eternal Spirit is waiting to take up his abode within us, to fill our souls with the comfort of his presence, and to make our very bodies his temples. These, my brethren, are the blessings which God is holding out to you, and to me, and to every one who is called by the name of Christ. He invites you to them as to a rich feast, in that noble passage of Isaiah (lv. 1); "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." No

invitation can be more bountiful, or more pressing: none therefore can be more gracious. It has the grace of condescension, for the Sovereign of the universe to abase himself so as to invite, and even to entreat his creatures, as he does in many passages of Scripture, where he almost forces them to come in and see the dainties he has prepared for them. It has the grace of bounteousness, to make ready so nourishing and rich a banquet for all who will be at the pains of going to it. To this we must add that most necessary and precious gift, or favour, or grace, (for the name does not matter, so you understand the thing,) the grace of mercy. When a king grants a pardon to his rebellious subjects, it is called an act of grace. Well then may the universal pardon which the King of heaven has freely offered to his rebellious subjects and children, if they will only come to him and accept it, well may a pardon joined with so much bounteousness and condescension be called pre-eminently the grace of God.

From this explanation of grace, it is easy to gather what the being in a state of grace means, and also to perceive when it may be truly said of any one, that he is in such a state. To be in a state of grace is to be at peace with God. It is to have come in and surrendered ourselves, as it were, and confessed our guilt; and having acknowledged our rebellion, and thrown ourselves on his promised mercy, and pleaded the death and merits of his Son as our only ground of pardon, it is to show our grateful sense of the forgiveness vouchsafed to us by living thenceforward as becomes the people of God. This is being in a state of grace. For though God's pardon is unbought and not to be bought by any human means, though they who buy it are to buy it without money and without price, still it is not unconditional. He pardons all who come to receive their lives at his hand, but none else. If a man will not come to God,

his sin and guilt cleave to him. When pardon is granted to a rebel, on his surrendering himself to the king's officers, and delivering up his arms, and promising to behave better, it stands to reason that the pardon will hold good only so long as the promise is kept. If the man breaks his word, and commits fresh outrages against the king's authority, his life is once more forfeited. This, which is true of earthly pardons, is equally true of heavenly. Every one who lives in sin, is living at enmity with God. He is living in rebellion against the ruler of the world; and so long as he continues in such rebellion, he is shut out by his own wilful obstinacy and perverseness from the free pardon which God has offered to mankind. It is impossible to be in a state of grace, so long as we abide in any known sin, whether of body or mind, whether of habit or passion, whether of society or selfishness. Of every sin, and every kind of sin, understand clearly, that the indulging in it is a bar which must shut you out from a state of grace. They who are in a state of grace, have at least set their faces toward the heavenly city: they have passed the strait gate, and have entered on the narrow way that leads to life.

It is not enough however for a person to be in a state of grace, unless he afterward persevere and grow in grace. Now what is meant by growth in grace? It means that the beginning of a journey is not the end of it. It means that we must advance in holiness, that, instead of resting on our oars, and priding ourselves on our present small attainments, we must press forward, giving all diligence, as St. Peter expresses it in a former passage of this Epistle, that we may add to our faith virtue, or energy, and to energy knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness universal charity. Here is a goodly list of qualities wherein to cultivate growth in grace, and to go on all our

lives advancing from grace to grace and from strength to strength.

But why does the apostle call it growth? Perhaps to remind us that the improvement he exhorts us to is not a mere mechanical task, which a man can begin and finish for himself; but that it is more like the gradual and secret workings of nature, where, though it is man's duty to dig and plough, and plant and sow, and weed and water, yet, after all is done, God alone giveth the increase; and unless he is pleased to bless the labours of the husbandman, they will have been in vain. Be this the reason or no, certain it is that in many places of Scripture a godly life is compared to growth. Indeed the very word *life* would lead us to look for growth: for everything that lives grows or has grown.

This, which is true of the lives of animals and plants, is equally true of the lives of Christians. The beginning of a christian life, you know, is called regeneration, or the being born again. But a Christian is not born full-grown in grace, any more than in body. We can enter the kingdom of heaven only as little children; and from that smallness and weakness of spiritual childhood we are to rise by degrees to the fullness of stature which belongs to christian manhood. Now this great change and increase can only be brought about by the soul's growing in grace, just as the body grows in strength and size. Such growth is indeed most necessary to a christian life; seeing that, if we live on without it, a thing most shameful will befall us. We shall be old in years, and infants in holiness: infants, not in sinlessness,—for in sins we shall be old enough,—but infants in our want of strength, infants in our want of knowledge, infants in our want of self-control, infants in our utter inability to walk straight, or to stand the least push of temptation. In all these things, if we do not grow in grace, we shall be no better than a tottering child. Our spiritual life will want

nerves and sinews; and so we shall draw down on ourselves the reproach of Reuben,—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel," (Gen. xlix. 4,) and like him shall forfeit our inheritance. Nay, unless we grow in grace, what shall we become in the end, but as it were so many spiritual dwarfs? Now what can be more unsightly? what can be more contrary to that beauty of holiness, which the Bible so often speaks of? Few things are so displeasing to the eyes of man, as a little stunted misshapen dwarf, who yet is only a dwarf in body: could you see a dwarf in soul, however, had you spiritual eyes to perceive him with, you would all cry out that he is far more displeasing. The dwarf in body is an object not for mockery but for pity; for his growth was not checked by any fault of his own: it is an affliction which God has sent him. But the dwarf, the hideous dwarf in soul, might have been otherwise if he would. Strive then to grow in grace, and take care that ye be not dwarfs in soul. Let the seed of the word grow within you. Seed, you know, is of no value unless it spring up. So is it with the seed of truth: that too must spring up, and grow, and must bear fruit: or we shall never be able to pay God the rent due to him for the farm of life which he has let to us. You remember how in the parable of the vineyard, when harvest came, the Lord sent a servant to the husbandman to receive his share of the fruit. But whence is the fruit to come, if there be no growth? In every point of view, then, whether we look on ourselves as God's tenants, who owe him rent, or as babes in Christ, who would fain become perfect men,—in every way there must be growth.

But if growth in grace be thus necessary and important, how are we to know for certain whether we are so growing or not? We may know it by comparing the state of our souls at present, with what it was a twelvemonth ago. Is there any temptation which you have outgrown, and lost

your relish for: as a man outgrows the games and sports of his childhood, and loses all relish for the playthings and the cakes which a few years back he was so fond of? Or is there any duty, which a twelvemonth ago was irksome to you, and which you have now learnt to practise, and gained a taste for? If you can answer these two questions satisfactorily, and find on examination that you have made what looks like an improvement, it remains for you in that case to ask yourselves, whether the improvement is a real one? Is it a cleansing of the outside of the platter only? or have you been scouring the inside also? I mean, the heart. Is it a growth in christian grace? or merely a greater regard for common decency? While you fancy you have been improving, have you not peradventure been only changing one sin for another? This is a very important question: because many deceive themselves, to their own mischief, by fancying they are growing better, when in truth they are only growing older, and are laying aside the sinful intemperance and extravagance of youth, to take up in their stead the no less sinful harshness and worldly-mindedness of old age. In a word, the true question to be answered is, have you since this time twelvemonth been going forward on the road to heaven? or have you been going backward? Many will doubtless answer, we have been standing still. But in so saying you pass a judgment against yourselves, and confess that you have been going backward. For life is a stream; and he who does not work his way up it, is carried down. Throw a stick into a river: will it stand still? Because, with so many temptations, and so many evil customs, setting down the stream against you, no more will you stand still, if you give way lazily to the current. It will bear you before it, slowly perhaps, but surely; just as a river, however sluggish, is sure to carry down the stick. Some motion there must be one way or other: if you do

not move toward God, you will be moved away from him. Growth there must be one way or other: if you do not grow upward, you will grow downward: if you do not rise up straight like a poplar, you will become as crooked and full of knots as an old crab, which is good for nothing but to be cut down and burnt.

There is another test and sign of growth in grace, which I will mention: an increased use of the means of grace, and an increased and increasing delight and relish in using them. Do you come to church oftener than you did? While here do you attend more to the prayers, and try more to join in them? Do you listen more than you did formerly to the sermon, and apply it to yourself as a glass to see your own sins with? Do you pray oftener when you are alone? Do you take more delight in prayer? and when you pray, do you find that you think more about what you are asking from God, that you care more about it, that you wish for it more, than you did some time back? Do you take up your Bible oftener, and enjoy reading it more, and find you understand it better? Do you feel a greater desire to partake in the Blessed Sacrament, and a greater comfort when you have taken it? These are among the surest signs of growth in grace: and he who finds them in himself, may cheer himself with the thought that he is truly increasing, not in grace alone, but also in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For in this too does the apostle in the text exhort us to grow. Not in mere head knowledge: this of itself is worth nothing. "If ye know these things, (says our Saviour,) happy are ye if ye do them." He does not say, that we are happy if we know them. That by itself can never make us, can never make any one happy. On the contrary, his words imply, that, if we know them, and do them not, we shall not be happy, but most wretched. Though

knowledge however, apart from practice, is worth nothing, yet knowledge of Christ and of his will, as guiding to practice, is most excellent. Nor is it merely excellent: it is necessary. For though we may know, and not do, yet, unless we know, how shall we do? How can men believe in him of whom they have not heard? Faith must come either by hearing the word of God, or by reading it. Without this, be it reading or be it hearing, without some instruction, without some knowledge of Jesus Christ, there can be no entrance into a state of grace. Religious knowledge being then in a manner the key of grace, must needs be necessary to all who desire to enter it. Indeed, if you think a little, you will see that knowledge, and nothing else, is at bottom the difference between you and the heathens. They have never heard of Christ; you have: therefore they do not believe in him; and you profess that you do. Had they been bred in a christian country, had they been brought to church from their early years, and sent to school, and had the same advantages which people enjoy here in England, they too would have been called Christians, just as we are. Judge then, whether it be not your duty to increase in religious knowledge as much as possible, that you may not be almost but altogether Christians. Judge, whether it does not behove you to prize the lamp thus entrusted to you; not allowing it to get dim or smoky through neglect, or to go out for want of oil, but ever trimming it and rubbing it, keeping the glass quite clear, and feeding the flame continually with the best and purest oil, that its light may be the brightest possible. The certainty of aim, the steadiness of will, the single-mindedness, the calm, noble, unswerving, persevering onwardness of purposes, which a light such as this gives a man, are above all price. Instead of wandering hither and thither, groping his way like a blind or a benighted person, he walks

in the light of day. Whatever his object may be,—and some object it will be whereby God may be glorified and man bettered,—that object he sees clearly: he sees too the straight road leading to it: and along that road he keeps ever advancing, overcoming the obstacles in his way by God's assistance, and with a gentle but unyielding hand pushing aside whatever would cross or thwart him.

It is not mere head-knowledge however, that St. Peter speaks of when he would have us grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is a living knowledge, a practical knowledge, a knowledge of the heart, the only knowledge which God loves: and this, we may be sure, is included in the apostle's precept. To describe it in three words, it is knowledge joined with love. If a man wants to know a thing, he will learn it: if the thing be good in his eyes, the more he knows about it, the more he will love it: and again the more he loves it, the more he will give his mind to it: thus his knowledge and his love will foster each other, and the two will grow together apace. Now that a knowledge of this sort will help a man to grow in grace, it cannot take many words to shew.

For he that grows in such a knowledge of Christ, is growing at once in christian faith and in christian love. And he who has faith and love, has the two eagle's wings which bear the soul up above the cares and snares of life, to that living fountain of light and joy the Sun of Righteousness in the heavens. It is said that young eagles will look upon the sun, and gaze till their bright eyes become clearer and more piercing, by drinking in light from that source of all earthly brightness. Follow their example, my brethren: look at Christ. Gaze day by day at the Sun of Righteousness: gaze at him from your youth upward; and your minds will in like manner become brighter and clearer,

your hearts will become purer and stronger. There is a special promise in the 40th chapter of Isaiah, that they who wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall mount up,—but whither? To the throne of grace, that there they may receive grace; to the presence of Jesus, that they may converse with him and dwell with him. They shall mount,—but how? As the young bright-eyed eagle mounts, to drink in more and more light by gazing on the Sun of Righteousness. If blessings such as these be ever vouchsafed to us,—and they will if we strive and pray for them earnestly,—then all that will remain for us, will be to cherish God's blessed gift by a deeper sense of what he has thus done for us, by a greater tenderness of conscience, and a livelier shrinking from every blast of sin. We must give heed to walk in all things according to the light we have received. And we must beware of thinking that what we have is enough. We must endeavour heartily to obtain more light, more of the knowledge and love of God, more of the spirit of Christ, more of his love and of the power of his holiness, that we may grow in grace as we grow in years, until we are at last transplanted from earth to heaven, there to grow for ever in the paradise of God.

IV.

DO AND YOU SHALL KNOW;

OR,

THE WILL AND THE DOCTRINE.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.

THE religion of Jesus Christ is altogether a practical thing. There is only one way of learning it; by practising it. There is only one way of knowing it; by living according to it. This is what our Lord says in the text. "They who will do the will of God, they who will put their hand to the plough, and set about doing their best to obey God, shall know of my doctrine, whether it comes from God or not. Its purpose is, not merely to teach men what is good, but to make them good: and it is only by trying the experiment for himself, it is only by striving to do the will of God, that any man can find out what great power there is in my religion, to change him into a new creature, and to make him wise unto salvation. Thus will he be convinced that the words which I speak, and which have such power, I speak not of myself, as a man: but that, as the power in them is the power of God, so the words themselves and the doctrine, must be from God."

Such is the account which Jesus Christ in the text gives of his doctrine. He does not say, that they who go to church twice every Sunday, shall know of his doctrine, whether it is from God. He does not say, that they who read a couple of chapters of the Bible every day, shall know of his doctrine, whether it is from God. But endeavour to do the will of God; and then you will know that the doctrine comes from God. By listening to sermons in church, and by reading the Bible at home, you learn what the doctrine is; but by trying to do God's will, you learn something of much greater importance: you learn that it comes from God. You see its truth. You feel its heavenly power of raising man from sin to righteousness, of freeing him from the bondage of Satan, and turning him into a child of God. In a word, by coming to hear sermons, and by reading the Bible, you learn what a Christian ought to be: by striving to do the will of God, you are a Christian.

This, our Lord tells us, is the right way to ascertain whether his doctrine comes from God. It is the right way, and the only way. Unless we try to do God's will, nothing else can teach us this truth. No labour, no learning, no cleverness, no thought will enable us to find it out. We may read our eyes blind, and wear out our understandings, in poring over the Bible; it will only be the word of man to us, not the word of God.

I began by saying that the religion of Jesus Christ is altogether a practical thing. This is the first and simplest and main reason why we are to learn it practically. Just consider how we are taught anything else that is practical; how a child, for instance, is taught to read. Is it by hearing about reading? or by being read to? A child might hear about reading, and might hear reading, all its life long; and, were this all, it would never be able to tell one letter from another. It can only learn to read by trying to read.

It must begin by learning its letters: when it knows its letters thoroughly, it must learn to put them together, first in short words or syllables, and afterwards in longer words; and lastly it must learn to put the words together, and to read them as they follow one another in the book. The same holds of everything else that is practical: whatever it may be, it must be learned by practice. It is not by hearing or reading about making shoes, that a man becomes a shoemaker, but by trying to make them. Above all is this true of that which is the most practical of all things, the religion of Christ. I call it the most practical of all things, because it is meant to be the rule and guide of our practice, not merely at certain moments, when we are engaged in any one particular employment, but at all times and in all places; because it ought to be the source and spring and mould and rule of all our thoughts and words and deeds. Or can you suppose that the service of the God of heaven is so much easier a task than every other, that, while every other thing we want to do must be learned slowly and laboriously and practically, the doing the will of God will come to us naturally and of itself? No: this too must be learnt by practice, by patient, diligent, steadfast practice.

But how, you may ask, are we to do the will of God,—how can we even strive to do it,—unless we know beforehand what it is? The question seems a very hard one; and yet the answer is easy: by faith. When a child is learning to read, it has to read at first without knowing how to read. It has to pronounce the letters and the words, without knowing what they are. It has to pronounce them at first after its teacher: by faith in him it learns what they are; and thus in course of time it gets to know what they are of itself. In like manner God has sent you spiritual teachers,—he has sent you the teaching of his word,—to tell you what his will is, before you can know it for your-

selves. There is no one,—in all England there is no one —among you assuredly there is no one—who, if he will but try to make the most of the opportunities God has given him of knowing his will, may not attain in the end to the precious knowledge spoken of by our Lord in the text, the knowledge that his doctrine is of God.

For this knowledge, like all practical knowledge, comes by degrees. Every slight improvement in practice,—nay, every attempt at an improvement, will lead to an increase of our knowledge: while every increase of our knowledge ought in its turn to lead to an improvement in our practice. Every fresh step we take in Christianity, we see further into it; and by seeing further into it we learn in what way we are to advance still further. The practice throws light on the wholesomeness of the doctrine: the doctrine on the other hand furnishes new motives and helps to the practice: thus they go on giving and receiving strength, each from and each to the other. They are like the warp and woof in weaving: the doctrine is the warp, into which we weave the woof: every fresh cast of the shuttle brings out more of the warp, until at length the whole is like Christ's coat, without seam, woven from the top throughout. Thus do the knowledge and practice of a Christian meet and unite, and, as it were, grow into one. For what is the doctrine of Christ? that doctrine which St. Paul, writing to the Colossians, calls "the riches of the glory of the mystery." It is, as St. Paul there sets it forth, that God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins." It is, that "it pleased the Father that in Christ Jesus should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself: and us too, that were sometimes alienated

and enemies in our minds by wicked works, hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present us holy and unblamable and unreprovable in his sight, if we continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel." In other words, the doctrine of Christ is that all men are sinners,—that all by their sins have offended the holiness of God, and have fallen under his wrath,—but that he, the eternal Son of God, came down from his throne in the heavens, to be a sacrifice for our sins, and to restore us to his Father's love. Now how can any one have any real and lively knowledge of this doctrine, unless he has set himself in earnest to do the will of God? A minister once told me, that a sick man, whom he had attended, on being asked what he rested his hopes on, replied that he believed he had always led a regular decent good life. On this the minister said: "That may be very well as far as it goes: but, in speaking of your hope of acceptance with God, have you nothing to say of Jesus Christ?" "Yes! (answered the sick man,) I think he must have something to do with it." Something to do with it! Was this knowing the doctrine? Is this like St. Paul's way of speaking, when he calls it "the riches of the glory of the mystery?" But how came it that this poor man had so scanty and faint a sense of what Christ had done for us? The reason plainly was, that he trusted in his regular decent life: he thought himself safe enough with that, and did not trouble his head about anything beyond. Let me now go a step further, and ask: how came he to trust in his regular life? Why, because he had never set himself seriously to do the will of God: therefore he had never gained a practical insight into his own sinfulness and weakness. He measured himself not by God's pure and holy law, but by the low and deceitful standard of the world: so he was satisfied with himself, and had no feeling

of his want of a Saviour. Here is a case of a man failing to arrive at a knowledge of Christ's saving doctrine, because he had never made it his business to do God's holy will. I fear too, the case is a very common one, even among those who call themselves by the name of Christ, and who have read their Bible and come to church all their lives.

Not that I mean to speak slightingly of reading the Bible. I have so often exhorted you to study it, you cannot suppose I mean that. Let every man know as much of the Bible as he can: no one can know too much of it. But then you must study it with a view to become better; you must take pains that your advance in doing the will of God may keep pace with your advance in knowing it. This is the right way of studying the Bible, and the right use to put it to. Any knowledge of God's will and of God's love but this will be useless to you: and not only will it be useless knowledge, it will also be imperfect knowledge. A true, a thorough, a saving knowledge of the Gospel can only be gained by practice. And a blessed thing it is for you, my people, that God has ordained it so to be. If head-knowledge, as it is called, had been the high-road to heaven, what would have become of the poor, who have so little time for study? But God in his grace has appointed another way for his people to learn how to serve him: and it is a way which the poor and simple, who have been taught the first principles of their duty, may travel along as easily and safely as the rich and learned. He has made religion a practical matter, to be learnt and perfected in every deed we do, in every word we speak, in every wish and thought of our hearts. Let none say he has no time to learn to be a Christian, if he has time to live and breathe. Have any of you things to vex you? That is the way God has appointed to teach his people patience. Is any one enjoying an abundance of good things? They are given to train us in tem-

perance, and in bounteousness, and in relieving the wants of others. Are some in poverty? It is a lesson of self-denial and contentedness. So whatever may betide you, be it sorrowful or be it joyful, I would have you think that it was sent you to teach and exercise you in such a grace, or to warn you from such a sin. Thus will you be learning Christianity practically. Thus, by carefully striving to do the will of God, will you be brought to the most perfect knowledge of the doctrine. Thus the tree of the Gospel will indeed be a tree of life to you, when you have planted a slip of it in your hearts.

But will the tree of the Gospel take root then in man's natural, unturned, uncultivated heart? You might as well throw an acorn on a rock, and expect to see it grow up an oak. Our hearts are stony: and they must be broken up. They have no depth of soil; and new soil must be brought to them. We must do as gardeners do: we must make a new and richer soil to receive the new plant; else it will never thrive in us. Our hearts are lying under the curse: they bring forth only thistles and briers: and we must endeavour to purge them from all such weeds, and to fit them for the knowledge of the doctrine, by trying to do the will of God.

Some however will perhaps ask me: Can we then do the will of God? No, my brethren: of ourselves assuredly we cannot. Therefore Christ does not say, He that doeth the will shall know: for that would be like saying, He that flies up into the clouds shall know. What Christ says is, that he who willeth or desireth to do the will,—for this is the true meaning of the passage,—he who earnestly wishes and strives to do the will of God, shall arrive at the knowledge of the doctrine. How? By doing it? No: but by finding that he cannot do it: by having his eyes opened to the true state of his soul, to its weakness, its helplessness, its sinfulness.

This knowledge is the very thing that a man needs, to bring him to embrace the Gospel with all his heart, so as to put his whole faith and trust in it. In other words, this is the same truth which St. Paul declares, when he tells us that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. That is to say, the knowledge of the obedience which God requires of us, as set forth in the law of Moses,—the conviction that we ought to pay him that obedience,—the feeling that we neither do nor can pay it,—these are the very things to wake a man out of the dream of his own merits, and to tutor and prepare him for receiving the forgiveness of his sins and eternal life as a free gift from God through Jesus Christ. In the first dangerous illness I had after I was grown up, I was forced to keep my bed for a week or more. While I did so, I was not aware how feeble I had become. But when I tried to get up, and could not so much as put on my clothes without help, I found out my own weakness. Just so it is with the sinner. So long as he is sick unto death, so long as he lies dead and almost buried in his sins, so long does he continue in ignorance of his true state. He dreams in his heart, "There is not much the matter with me; I shall easily get well, and have little need of a physician." Thus he dreams, till God sends something to rouse him from his deadly slumber. Some great disappointment teaches him the vanity of all earthly plans: or some affliction pierces and startles him. The man opens his eyes, and sees the wrath of God hanging like a drawn sword over him. In his fright he perhaps tries to get up. Get up! He can no more get up, and quit his evil habits, than I could get up from my sick-bed after my illness. Back he falls, after finding out his own weakness, which before he had no suspicion of; and there he lies, in the wickedness which he is now conscious and afraid of, but which he feels he has not strength to forsake. Meanwhile the wrath of God is still hanging

over his head, and seems to be drawing nearer every moment.

To a sinner in this state of conscious guilt and feebleness the Gospel is indeed a blessing. For what does it shew him? It shews him Jesus Christ stepping between, to shield him from the wrath of God, and receiving the blow into his own heart. And when, in his astonishment at so unlooked-for a deliverance, he cries to his unknown Saviour, —"Who art thou, thus to take on thyself the punishment which I have so richly deserved?"—how must his heart beat on hearing this affectionate rebuke! "I am Jesus, whom thou hast persecuted all thy life long. Thou wast enrolled among my servants in thine infancy, and didst receive my mark, the sign of the cross, on thy forehead. But when thou grewest up, thou desertedst me. Thou hast broken my laws: thou hast neglected me: thou hast set thy heart on the things which I have forbidden. Thou hast robbed my heavenly Father and me of the honour and love which thou owedst us. Instead of serving God and me, thou hast been serving sin and Satan. For all these offences of thine, my only revenge is dying to save thee. I have died, that thou, and every other sinner, who will only hearken and turn to me, may live. Take thy life, which I have bought so dearly. Arise; renounce thy sins, betake thyself to repentance and holiness; and live." Such is the language which Jesus Christ in his gospel speaks to the awakened sinner. And would not words thus touching go straight to the heart of a man who finds himself in the state I have been describing? To your hearts, it may be, they do not go. Why? Because you are still asleep; because you have not yet begun to try to do the will of God: hence your sinfulness and weakness are still unknown to you. But put yourselves in the place of the man I have been speaking of: picture to yourselves the wrath of God

ready to fall on you for your misdeeds. I need not tell you that there it is, hanging over every sinner, whether he sees it or no, and that "on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." (Matt. xxi. 44.) Suppose then that your eyes were opened, and that you saw it there over your heads, would not the offer of pardon for Christ's sake at once become the very best news I could bring you? Would not the great truth, that Christ died for us, come home to your heart and soul with quite another force, if you could behold him receiving the blow in your place, and drawing off the lightning on his own head? Would not this make you feel the meaning of those blessed words,—Christ has died for me? Surely these things must needs move you, were you to see them. But the conscience of the awakened sinner does see them: therefore they move and shake him to the bottom of his stony heart. The Scripture says, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." (Rom. xii. 20.) This is just the way in which our Saviour tries to work upon the sinner. As soon as he has come to himself, so as to be awake to his own danger, Christ appears to him, and shews him his hands and his side, and says to him, "I have paid all." Does not this heap coals of fire on the sinner's head? Does not this bow him down to the very dust in shame and sorrow, that he should have been so ungrateful and rebellious against his best friend and only Saviour? Does not this open his eyes also, to see the hatefulness of sin? Before, he had thought but lightly of it. Now however the guilt of sin stares him in the face. Turn where he will, he sees it ever before him, written in the blood of the Son of God. Such is the manner in which the first great doctrine of Christianity, the doctrine of the atonement by the sacrifice and death of Christ, works on the heart and soul of the

sinner, when he begins to feel an earnest wish to do the will of God. And can he, after thus feeling the power of the doctrine,—can he doubt whether it comes from God? He carries the proof that it does so within him, in his grateful sense of God's goodness, and in his longing thus kindled in his heart to lead a more godly life.

But how is this longing to be satisfied? In my illness, as soon as I found out my weakness, I began wishing that I was a little stronger. But my wishes did not make me stronger: and when I first tried to walk across the room, in spite of all my wishes I should have fallen if I had not had a friendly arm to hold me up. So is it with the sinner. Christ has saved him from punishment, and in so doing has supplied the first and most grievous of his wants. But he has still another very great and very pressing want. He wants the strength to lift him up from his evil habits to a life of holiness and obedience. He cannot lift himself up; and Christ as yet has not done this for him. He has said to him, Thy sins are forgiven thee: but he has not yet completed the work of mercy: he has not yet said to him, Arise and walk. It is here, in this hour of conscious feebleness, when the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, that the other great doctrine of our faith steps in: I mean, the help of the Holy Ghost. The man begins to see that he has a new strength put into him, in addition to his own, and far beyond it. He finds that he can do to-day what he was unable to do yesterday. At first perhaps this may puff him up somewhat; and, as a sick man, on gaining a little strength, is apt to fancy he shall be quite well in a few days; so the sinner, when he has been enabled to withstand a temptation or two, may perhaps fancy that he is already become a master in holiness. But he is soon cured of this mistake. The Spirit of God withdraws, and leaves him to himself; and all his former weakness comes back

upon him. Then in his distress does he call upon the Lord, and cry to his God; and the Spirit of God returns to him, and again takes him by the hand, and lifts him up, and enables him to walk safely. This goes on time after time, until his experience at length convinces him that so long as he trusts wholly to God, he is borne up along the path of righteousness; but that, the moment he tries to walk by his own strength, his feet slip under him, and he falls. Thus we have the other great doctrine of Christianity brought home to a man's heart, by his striving to do the will of God. He can now say of the promise of the Holy Spirit, as he before said of forgiveness by the blood of Christ, I know that the doctrine comes from God.

Now can you think it possible, my brethren, when a person has been thus thoroughly convinced by his own experience of the truth of these two great doctrines, that any arguments of the most subtle man in the world should shake his faith in them? It cannot be. A mere nominal Christian indeed may easily have his belief in these doctrines shaken, if not overthrown: because to him they are only words, to which he attaches no living meaning. But once make a man feel the power of the doctrines,—let him have been healed by the balm of Christ's blood, let him have leant his frail resolutions on the arm of the Holy Spirit,—what can shake his faith in them then? He has the witness of their truth in himself. He knows it on the strength of the blessings he himself has derived from them. Therefore all the arguments in the world can no more make his faith in them waver, than the arguments of a blind man, however hard to shake off, would persuade you that you do not see. This is what our Saviour calls knowing the doctrine. It is the true way of knowing religious truth: and whereas St. Paul says of the vain-glorious knowledge and false philosophy of the Corinthians, that it shall vanish away, the

knowledge I am speaking of,—the humble practical heart-knowledge of the great things which the Son and Spirit of God have done and are still doing for our souls,—this knowledge shall never fail, but shall go on increasing for ever.

What has been said of the doctrines of Christ, is equally true of the means of grace by which those doctrines are brought home to us. Their value to the soul can only be learnt practically, from our own experience. Would you know the blessing of prayer? Pray. Would you know the blessing of God's word? Study it. But you must pray with your heart, study with your heart, with an earnest wish to know God's will, and to do it. The man who comes to church, and yawns through the service,—the man who reads his chapter in the New Testament as a task on a Sunday evening,—can never have a notion what a delight and high privilege it is to the Christian to pray, or what exceeding light and comfort the Christian draws from the Scriptures. As for prayer, the nominal Christian probably does not know what praying is. He has heard that he ought to say his prayers; and so he says them now and then: and he mostly finds it a wearisome unprofitable ceremony. But saying prayers is no more praying, than a corpse is a living man. Would a creature that had only seen a corpse, be able to make out from it what a living man is? No more can a person, who is only accustomed to say his prayers with his lips, conceive the life and power of a prayer which bursts forth from a beseeching heart. To know what praying is, a man must begin by praying himself: and the more earnestly he prays, the more will he learn to prize the inestimable blessing God has given us in allowing us to speak to him in prayer. In like manner is it with the study of the Scriptures. Those who read the Bible as a mere form, may think that many other books are more entertaining. Those who read it with no view beyond the knowledge they wish

to gain from it, may even fancy that there are other books still more instructive. But they who read it for the sake of doing the will of God, will see God's will written in every page of it. Every page will yield them consolation: every page will be a lantern to their steps.

But it is above all with regard to the promises and higher graces of Christianity, that this practical knowledge is required. The peace of God, as you hear every Sunday, passeth all understanding: that is to say, the mere natural man cannot understand it, cannot frame any notion of it. Learning cannot teach it him. To know what it is, we must feel it. To the children of this world it is as sound to the deaf: to those whose religion is a mere form, it is as music to a man who has no ear. But the children of God have an ear for it; so that it finds an answer within them, and tunes all the strings of their hearts. The happiness it bestows is such as nothing on earth can give, such as nothing on earth can overthrow. Only look at the glowing expressions of that happiness, which are strewn so richly through the epistles of St. Paul. Only read the beautiful letter to the Philippians, which he wrote when in bonds and in peril of his life. The peace of God breathes through it. His very dangers seem to make him more joyful, more triumphant, as if he was already at the gates of heaven. "Every way (he says) Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. Yea, and if I be offered up on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." Do ye desire, brethren, to feel this joy, that nothing can trouble? You must begin by doing the will of God. You must begin, as St. Paul exhorts the Philippians, by working out your salvation with fear and trembling: and after you have done this faithfully and steadfastly, you may perhaps hear him calling to you, as he called to them, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice."

V.

FAITH.

HEBREWS xi. 1.

the substance of things hoped for.

ifts to man the most comforting and
is faith. "How can that be?" methinks
asking, "when St. Paul in his Epistle to
ls us so plainly that charity is greater
at I have just said be true, if faith be
engthening and the most comforting gift
ıay seem a hard saying that even charity,
: better than faith. Can anything be
ich strengthens us and comforts us? I
estion by asking one. Can anything be
ch gives health? Yes surely: health itself
vhich gives health. So is strength itself
ıich strengthens. But faith is only that
Charity or love is strength itself. The
ng of the former, the sweetest and most
the tree of faith bears. Could love be
ı it would be no better than a windfall.
ıt: whether it be toward God, or toward
so closely are they bound together, that,
:, love in its turn fosters faith. It is so

even in our earthly affections. What should we say of that love, whether of a friend for a friend, of a child for a parent, or of husband for a wife, which did not begin in confidence, and end in confidence? Surely we should all say that it did not deserve the name of love; that it was suspicion, that it was jealousy, that it was doubt, and that these are all of them things most alien and contrary to love. This is the sentence we should pass on such distrust and want of confidence between man and man; and is there less ground for our faith, less assurance for our trust, when the parties are man and God? God is our Father; Christ has called us friends: our Lord has espoused the Church, and united her to him in a mystical bond which is never to be loosed. Friend, husband, father,—all the seeds of trust and love are here. Let them sink deep into your hearts, brethren; and pray earnestly to God, who giveth the increase, and sendeth his rain to make the earth fruitful, beseeching him to pour down his Holy Spirit upon you, that the good seed may take root in you, and may bring forth a rich spiritual harvest of holy thoughts and heavenly desires, of meekness, gentleness, humility, patience, and godly perseverance in all the works and offices of love.

This love, as I have already said, must spring from faith; and by faith must be continually fed. It is chiefly from bearing so excellent a fruit, that the tree is such a precious gift to man. Still it does bear that fruit: and as there must be a tree to gather the fruit from, before we can hope to gather fruit, so must faith have grown up and blossomed within us, before we can cool our dry and feverish natures with love and the other fruits of the Spirit. In this sense, as the only true parent of the other christian graces, is faith so highly spoken of in the New Testament, where it is said by St. Peter "to purify the heart," by St. Paul "to work righteousness," and by St. John to be "the victory that overcometh the world."

What, then, is this faith? Not this hypocritical show of faith reproved by St. James. That is only an outward lying mockery of faith, and no more faith itself, than crocodile's tears, as they are called, are the true sorrow of the heart, no more than the wolves our Lord speaks of became real sheep by putting on sheep's clothing. The faith which God approves is not feigned but true. It springs sometimes in the head, oftener in the heart, but in each case flows on till it has filled both. For it is such a hearty belief in God and in his Son, such a steadfast conviction of the truth of all that he has taught us in the Bible, as mixes itself up with our whole life, spreading, like a finer leaven, through every part of our nature, and leavening what before was hard and heavy, until we become like the shewbread of which we read in the law of Moses, fit, when we have been hallowed by the incense of prayer, to be brought to God's holy table.

This is what the apostle means, when he calls faith "the substance of things hoped for." In like manner it might be called the substance of things feared. For what is a substance? A thing of the reality of which we can fully satisfy ourselves; a thing we can see, and feel, and handle, so as to convince ourselves by these and the like methods, that it is a real thing, and not a shadow. Hence you may easily see how faith is the substance of things hoped for or feared. It gives them a substance, by bringing God's promises and threatenings home to our hearts, and keeping them before our minds, and making us feel their truth. When faith reaches this strong growth, it is sure to do its right work, in holding us back from evil, and spurring us on to good. It is quite sure to do this: because God has so fashioned us, has so made the desires of our hearts shape themselves according to the full convictions of our understandings, that no man in possession of his senses will either wish for what

he knows to be utterly impossible, or try what he is quite sure will do him much more harm than good. Infants will often stretch out their little hands and catch at a flame. Why do grown-up people never put their hands into it? Because we know the certain consequence of meddling with fire, which an infant does not. We have felt the pain of burning, and are afraid of it: and so the thought of playing with the beautiful flame never crosses us. My brethren, hell is hotter than any earthly fire: why then are we not afraid of playing with it? Plainly, because we do not thoroughly believe what our Lord has said and threatened; because we think that it is possible to serve two masters, though Christ has told us that it is not: because we still listen to the whispers of the serpent, and flatter ourselves that we shall not surely die.

Moreover, as a hearty belief in the threatenings of the Bible would scare men from all sin, so would a hearty belief in its glorious promises stir them up to all goodness. For as the proper business of man in this world is to do the will of God, faith, which is a man's proper principle, is a stirring, active principle. Look at the power which a strong persuasion and belief has in the affairs of this world; and you may judge what ought to be its power in the affairs of heaven and of eternity. Only give a man good grounds for believing that he will make a great fortune by going to India; he will leave his home, and cross the seas, and bear all manner of hardships, and expose himself to the dangerous diseases common in hot climates: he would do all this readily and cheerfully: and though he should fail once and again, he will persevere until at last he succeeds. Now were any one to ask this man why he runs into all these toils and perils, what would be his answer? "I do all this because I believe that I shall grow very rich thereby." Our Lord, you remember, compares his kingdom to a merchant, who,

when he had found a pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Men will do this for the sake of obtaining a pearl. They will do thus much for the sake of gaining a thing that they truly believe to be desirable and precious. Should not we then, if our faith were as strong as the faith of the children of this world,—if we as thoroughly believed that joys and glories, greater than we can ask or conceive, are stored up in heaven for such as are diligent in fulfilling their duty to God and their neighbour,—should not we, if we really believed this, do as much to obtain this happiness as the merchant to get his pearl? He, we read, "sold all that he had." Which of us has ever done as much, or half as much, or a tenth part as much, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven? Alas! it is still as it was in our Lord's days: the children of this world are still wiser in their generation than the children of light. We profess to believe that treasures in heaven are far better than treasures on earth. Were any one to ask us, we should say, that there is not the slightest comparison between them. Yet for the latter, which we declare to be of little worth, we labour from morning to night; while we leave the former, though above all worth, to take their chance. Does not this prove that our faith is only lip-deep, a string of words, and nothing more,—that things hoped for have no substance in our eyes,—that we do not heartily believe heaven to be worth so very much, or that there will be any great difficulty in getting there? We shall arrive there at last, we flatter ourselves, if we live long enough. Meanwhile there can be no great harm in stopping a little, and idling a little, and sleeping a little by the way. But what if we do not live long enough? What if the night of death, when no work can be done, overtake us in the middle of our journey? What if a storm break over us? Where shall we take refuge? where shelter ourselves from the wrath of God?

My brethren, would you think thus lightly, thus carelessly of heaven, if you, like St. John, had seen the holy city coming down from God? if you had heard the great voice saying, "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: behold, the tabernacle of God is with men; and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." (Rev. xxi. 3, 4.) If you had heard these gracious promises with your bodily ears, if you had seen this glorious city with your bodily eyes, would you think of loitering and dallying on the road? When you read the Bible, if you had but faith, you would hear all these things with the ears, and see them with the eyes of faith. St. John, who heard and saw them, has written them in the book of Revelation for our instruction, that, knowing what a prize is set before us, we may walk worthy of our calling, and give all diligence to make it sure.

Hitherto I have spoken of faith solely as it regards the things of eternity. But there is also a faith which regards the things of this world. For God is not the God of heaven only: he is also the God of earth: and our belief in him must apply to our state here, as fully and strongly as to our state hereafter. We must look up to him as the Father of all mercies, as the giver of every good we enjoy or hope for, as our counsellor in doubt, our friend in need, our comfort and support in sorrow. We must believe him to be all these things; because the Bible tells us that he is so. If we do not, the plain truth is, we do not believe the Bible. Are we not told that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father? that the very hairs of our head are all numbered? Are we not commanded to make all our desires known to God? And can we truly believe that these, and numberless other like passages, do indeed come from God? yet at the same time feel doubts about the

events in our own lives whether they are ordained by God or no? The real Christian feels no such doubts. In all that happens in this world he tries to discern the finger of God. In all that happens to himself, he sees the dispensations of a loving Father,—if his lot be dark, his merciful chastenings,—if bright, his gracious bounty. This is that dutiful trust or reliance in God, which shines so in the patriarchs of the Old Testament, above all in Abraham, who was ready to offer up even his son, his only son, Isaac, at the Lord's command. Therefore did he obtain the glorious name of the Father of the Faithful. Would we approve ourselves his children, we must imitate his faith, by resting wholly on the goodness of God as our only staff and comforter. For this is faith, as shewn forth in the concerns of this mortal life. It is to trust in the promises of God, when sorrow and death are gathering round us. It is to uphold ourselves in the lowest nakedness of poverty, by throwing ourselves on his fatherly care. It is to be cheerful in the midst of gloom, to smile when all around is frowning, to be content under the pressure of tribulation, and to feel that all things are working together for our good under the guidance of all-wise love. It is to strengthen ourselves in God when we are weakest, to believe when we see no hope, to give back all God's best gifts to him without a murmur, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, wife, children, whenever he is pleased to call for them. All these things are impossible to the natural man: but all things are possible to faith: and blessed are they who have such a faith as will enable them to work these miracles.

I will conclude by exhorting you in the words of St. Paul: "Examine yourselves, brethren, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) How is this to be done? St. Paul goes on: "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" This is the touch-

stone of faith. If Jesus Christ dwells in us, we are true believers: if he does not, we have no faith. But how shall we know whether Christ dwells in us or not? St. Paul tells us this also: "If Christ be in you, the body is dead, by reason of sin; but the spirit is life, by reason of righteousness." (Rom. viii. 10.) This is the Christian's mark, and the sign of a true believer,—a death unto sin, and a living unto righteousness,—a mortified body and a quickened spirit.* By this we see what we have to trust to. For such believers, and such only, as bear this Christian mark, will be acknowledged by Christ to be his servants and his brethren, in that great day when hope and trust shall give place to assurance and possession: and when they who have been faithful in a few things, that is, they who, while they lived, were full of a sincere, active, humble faith, shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

* From the conclusion of the Discourse on Faith in Taylor's Life of Christ.

VI.

THE GOSPEL LEAVEN.

MATT. xiii. 33.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

THERE are two things we should always keep in mind, —what we ought to be, and what we are. In fixing our eyes on what we ought to be, we see the good we should aim at: in looking at what we are, we see the evil we should get rid of. If we thought only of what we ought to be, we might pass through life without ever finding out our own sinfulness, and might even fall into fancying that, because we know and approve what is good and right, we must be good and right ourselves. On the other hand, if we kept our eyes only on what we are, we should grow so accustomed to our sins, and to the sins of those about us, that we should cease to think of the great guilt and danger of such common every-day matters, and perhaps should get almost to look upon them as things of course. A man may walk with his eyes bent on the ground, till he grows double; a man may live in sin, and hear of sin, and look on sin, till he loses all sense of uprightness. For these reasons the two things,—*what we ought to be, and what we are,*—should often be compared together. When this is done, and they

are brought before a man, and the difference between them is pointed out to him,—when the preacher says to us, "Look here! this glorious pattern of excellence is what God designed you to be; but, alas! that little puny, crooked, stunted thing is what you are,"—the glaring contrast between what we ought to be, and what we are, may awaken even the proudest and most conceited to a sense of their manifold imperfections, and may move them for very shame to set about mending and improving.

Now what we ought to be, we may learn from the parable which I have chosen for my text. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened." You all know what leaven is, or at least you know what yeast is, which is nearly the same thing. You know too that, if you want to have good bread, you must begin by getting good yeast, and must knead it up with the flour, so that the dough may rise and become light, instead of being heavy and lumpish. Now Jesus Christ in this parable tells us, that as yeast is mixed up with flour, and works its way through every part of it, in order to turn it into bread, in like manner must his Gospel be mixed up with the hearts of men, and must work through every part of them, before they can be turned from children of death into what children of life ought to be. The leaven of his word must work in them, until the whole is leavened,—not only their outward behaviour, but their inward feelings also,—not only their deeds, but their words, and their very thoughts,—and not only those feelings and thoughts which seem to belong more nearly to religion, but all their feelings and all their thoughts. Whether in church or out of church, at home or abroad, in business or in pleasure, whether with his family, or with his servants, or with his friends,—wherever the Christian may be, and whatever he may be about, the leaven

of the Gospel will be living and working in him. Whatever he does, he will do as unto God, always bearing in mind that he is God's child and God's servant. As a good child, and a good servant, always keeps his father's or his master's will steadily in view, and endeavours to perform it, so does the follower of Christ try to follow Christ in doing the will of his Father. As light cannot hide itself, or check itself, but when a candle is burning in a room, it fills the whole room with light, and leaves no corner of it in darkness; so, when the light of the Gospel is burning in a man, it must needs spread through every part of him, and fill every part with light: and it enables him to walk in everything, and to act in everything, not blindly, as in darkness, but seeingly, so that he knows what he ought to do, and is able to do it. This, I say, it must needs do, unless there be something within him to check it: for the light will not check itself, or stop of itself. The leaven will work through his whole heart and soul and mind, raising them all, turning them all from heavy lumps of dough into nourishing wholesome bread. There is no part of a man's nature which the Gospel does not purify, no relation of life which it does not hallow. It does not make him less a husband, less a father, less a son, less a servant, than he was before: it does not rob him of one of his finer feelings, of one of his home affections, of one of his powers of body or of mind: but it gives them all a lift, and sanctifies them all, and makes them all rise heavenward.

This, I say, is what we ought to be: this is the effect which the Gospel ought to produce on a man's character, and which it would produce, if it were received with child-like simplicity and devotion. But does it in fact produce this effect? does it do so frequently and commonly? Has it done so in all of us, in whom it ought to have been working ever since we were baptized into the name of

Jesus? Are we what we ought to be? This is the second question: What are we? What is the nature of the characters which we find among the bulk of men calling themselves Christians? This is the subject on which I am going to preach to you to-day. I am going to speak to you of the truth, not as it is in Christ Jesus, and as it ought to be in you, pure and beautiful and spotless,—but of the truth as it is to be seen in too many calling themselves Christians, corrupt and deformed and full of spots. I am going to shew you how in point of fact the leaven of the Gospel does work, or rather how its working is checked and hindered, in the bosoms of too many, who would be shocked and angry if I told them that they are far from the kingdom of God. Yet if it be true that, in whatever man the principles of christian holiness exist in spirit and in power, they must needs go on working, until the whole man is leavened, what must we think of those persons who are content to stop short of that total leavening? I say, who are *content* to stop short; for I am not speaking of those faithful Christians, who, conscious of their failings, are striving to press on toward perfection. To them I have only to say, God speed you on your road! Many however are making no such efforts: some of these are not yet leavened at all; some may be a quarter leavened, some half leavened, and some three parts leavened. But whatever differences there may be among these four classes, they all agree in this,—that they are content to stop short of that total leavening, which alone proves the authority of God and of his Son to reign above all and over all in the heart. Now willingly to stop short of this total leavening is willingly to stop short of heaven. For what says the text? The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened. The whole then must be leavened, or at least must be in a fair way of

being leavened: else the principle at work within us is not the pure and living principle of Christ's kingdom: it is not Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God, unto salvation. For Christ's power is almighty. He did not, when on earth, cast six devils out of Mary Magdalene, and leave one: he cast out all the seven. He did not partly cure the lame man at the pool of Bethesda: he made him every whit whole. So was it during our Saviour's stay on earth: and so must it be with us his people, now that he is King in heaven. Every high thing that exalteth itself within us against the known will of God must be cast down: every thought must be brought into obedience to Christ. Less than this must not satisfy us, if we would be numbered among Christ's true people. What then ought we to think of those who are satisfied with less? Yet we ourselves are perhaps among the number. We have perhaps been content to go on hitherto with an unleavened heart, with an unleavened will, with an unleavened tongue, with an unleavened temper; and, unmindful of what we ought to be, are satisfied to continue as we are. Surely a danger of this kind deserves to be well guarded against. Look then on the pictures I am about to set before you: listen to the descriptions I shall now draw, first of those unhappy persons who are not leavened at all, next of those who are a quarter leavened, thirdly of those who are half leavened, and fourthly of those who are three parts leavened: and as each of these four pictures passes before your eyes, say to yourselves, Is this my state?

First, there are persons, I fear, in every congregation, who as yet are not leavened at all. And who are they? Why, they are those who put on their religion with their Sunday clothes, and with their Sunday clothes take it off again. They come to church, when they have nothing else to do: they say the Lord's Prayer now and then: if they can read,

they sometimes read a chapter in the New Testament. This makes up the sum of their religion. Except at those particular times when they have a Bible or Prayerbook in their hands, they act, and think, and speak, as if there were no righteous God in heaven. Can we say of such persons that they are leavened? They have not even begun to be leavened. The leaven of the Gospel has not begun to shew itself in any part of their behaviour. There is nothing in their lives, which proves them to be the better for all they may have learnt of God and Christ. Therefore I can only liken them to flour into which leaven has been put; but, from something wrong or other, it has not begun to work. If flour in such a state deserves to be called bread, then may men in such a state deserve to be called Christians. Now can this be a safe state to loiter and to sleep in? Can they be safe, who have not so much as taken the first step toward becoming Christians in anything more than name? If any such be here present, I beseech you, weigh this well. Perhaps you have reached the noon of life; nay, perhaps you are already in the evening of your days, and the shades of night, the shades of death, are closing round you. You have a great deal of work on your hands; you have a long journey to take; and you have not even put your hands to the plough: you have not yet entered upon the road to God. Is this a safe state for any one to tarry in a moment longer? Up and work, while it is yet day with you; up and on your road to heaven. Hasten to Christ; for he has said, I am the door, and the way, and the life. Faith in him is the only door, keeping his commandments the only way, that can lead you to life eternal.

But there is a second class of persons, a shade better than the former, persons who have some general notions and faint feelings about religion, but are held in bondage by some known sin. These I call the quarter leavened.

Religion has begun to make some slight impression on them. Perhaps the threatenings of the Gospel have startled them; or its promises have caught their fancy. Perhaps the goodness of their Saviour has kindled a spark of grateful love in their hearts. They would fain go to heaven, and flee from hell, and follow Christ, and own him for their Lord and Saviour, if they could do it all without pains or cost. But they cannot. Heaven is not to be reached so easily. They must work out their salvation: they must strive to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk along the narrow way: they must follow Christ with a cross upon their shoulders: they must deny themselves: they must fight against the sin to which they have hitherto been captive, and not only fight against it, but conquer it; and not only conquer it, so as to be free from it in practice, but they must even learn to hate it. Now all this effort, and striving, and battling, is more than they can make up their minds to. Yet until they have resolved on this, and have done it, they cannot be called Christ's people. For what does St. Paul say? "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." So that, unless we have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts,—unless, to say the very least, we are doing our utmost for Christ's sake to mortify and destroy all the evil passions and desires so agreeable to our corrupt nature, we are none of Christ's; we have no claim to be numbered among his people. But perhaps you will tell me that these men are to be pitied for living, as they do, in sin. You will plead in their behalf, that they do not love their sin, but sin against their better judgment; that they are carried away in spite of themselves by the force of habit, by temptation, by the example of others. I answer, God forbid that they should love their sin! if they did, they would not be so much as a quarter leavened. Still it is quite enough to condemn a man, that he is habitually guilty of what he

knows to be sinful. Hear what St. Paul says of such a man: he calls him the slave of sin; and his wages are to be death. These men then, even by the shewing of those who speak the best of them, are slaves, the slaves of sin. Until the Gospel leaven has spread through the hearts and lives of these poor slaves, until Christ has set them free from the chain of their sins, until they have become Christians in feeling and deed, as well as in wish and word, they must not cherish a hope of that eternal life which Christ has prepared for such as truly love him. For everlasting life is the gift of God: and he will never give so good a gift to the slaves of sin; he will keep it for his own servants, who have served him faithfully and from the heart.

The third class I am to speak of are the half leavened. I call those half leavened, who divide their life into two parts, confining their religion to particular times, when they are engaged in the worship of God, while they carry on their worldly affairs in a worldly spirit. These persons are generally well enough as far as the external form goes. They are free from all gross vices; they are decent and orderly in their way of living; they observe all the ceremonies of religion: if God were satisfied with outward worship, they would be as good Christians as any. But follow them to their shop, to their business, to their families, and what becomes of their religion? It is nowhere to be seen. Ask after it: they will tell you that they are not methodists, that religion is a very good thing in its proper place, that they are quite as strict as their neighbours, that they never swear, nor do anybody any harm, that they would not be guilty of anything really wicked on any account, but that, living in the world, they must needs do as the world does, to avoid being cheated and laughed at. This, or something like it, is the language of the half leavened. But is this the language of the Gospel? Look the whole New Testament

through, from the first chapter of St. Matthew to the last of the Revelation, and see if you can find a single word in favour of doing as the world does. Not one such word will you find there: but you will find many words, many texts, many warnings, many commands against it. You will find St. Paul (Rom. xii. 2) telling us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed, or changed so completely, as to become quite new men. You will find St. John (1 ii. 15) exhorting us not to love the world, nor the things of the world; for, if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. You will find St. James (iv. 4) declaring that the friendship of the world is enmity with God; so that whoever will be friends with the world, is the enemy of God.

As for doing as others do, if that is to be the rule of right, what is the meaning of all those texts, which tell us that Christ came to redeem us to himself for a peculiar people? Peculiar in what? Why, in acting differently from others. We must be peculiar, if we are Christ's people, in utterly renouncing Mammon. We must be peculiar in acting upon those christian principles, which are foolishness to the worldly. We must be peculiar in taking God's law for our rule, God's Son for our pattern, God's love for our motive, God's glory and approbation for our end and aim. Christ's people are peculiar in living unto God, in keeping him always before their eyes, in giving him the first place in their thoughts, in making it their chief study and delight to please him. Above all, they are peculiar in setting their hearts, not on anything which this world can bestow, but on the blessed prospect of living, after death, with Christ and God. These are the things which Christ's people are peculiar in: these, in other words, are the marks of the true Christian. In proportion as a person has these divine marks in him, in the same proportion is he a true Christian. But if so, the man who

professes to do as others do, and to take the world for his guide and model, must be very far from being a true Christian. He may pass for a respectable and worthy man in the opinion of his fellows; but their opinion will stand him in little stead at the judgment-seat of his Lord. There the question will be, not what men thought of him, but what Christ thinks of him. He will be asked, not merely whether he was sober, and orderly, and honest, according to the scant low measure which the decencies of the world require; but whether he was in all points a follower of his crucified Master to the best of his means and power. This is the question we shall be asked there: therefore this is the question which, if we are wise, we shall be careful to ask ourselves here. We should each say to himself, What answer shall I be able to make, when Christ asks me this searching question? or what will it profit me to gain the praise of men, if I draw down the condemnation of God? In speaking about this class of persons, assuredly I have spoken too favorably, when I have called them half leavened. The leaven has not worked its way into their hearts: it has not worked its way into their daily life and conduct. Therefore their Christianity in the eye of God is only so much outside show. There is none of the pulp or juice in them: their religion is merely rind and parings.

But, as it is not enough to be half leavened, neither is it enough for us to be only three parts leavened. The whole must be leavened. I call those persons three parts leavened, who are truly religious in the main. They have a strong sense of their duty to God, a strong sense of their duty to their neighbour: they act more or less from a religious principle: they are diligent in reading the word of God: they often help the poor: they are anxious for the conversion of Turks and Jews and heathens: they like to hear of what is doing by the Missionaries, who are preach-

ing Christ in foreign countries: and they are ready to give their mite toward furthering so good a work. What then do they lack? Why, they lack, if they have nothing more than this, the all-pervading leaven of the Gospel. The yeast has worked in them, and worked well: but still there are often parts in such people, which are not yet quite leavened. I will instance the temper and the tongue. I know not why it is, that sourness and tartness of temper are so often complained of in religious people. It may be, the world is on the watch against such persons, and takes count of failings in them, which in others pass unnoticed. It may be, that, among those who are religious, many have been led to religion by sickness or by age; and sickness and age do not improve the temper. It may be, that, in order to become religious, they have had to fight many hard battles with their own hearts: they may have had much reason to be dissatisfied with themselves for their slow progress in holiness: perhaps they have suffered vexation and persecution from their less religious friends and neighbours and relations: and all these things are likely to hurt and sour the temper. But whatever be the reason, certain it is that religious people are charged with being harsh, and even uncharitable in temper, oftener than with any other fault.

Another fault not seldom found in religious persons is an unruly tongue. Not that they are more guilty on this score than others: on the contrary they are less so. Still it is a fault they are often guilty of: and it is one of those spots which one does not much heed, when the whole character is ungodly, but which looks very black and ugly on the whiteness of a Christian's coat. By unruliness of tongue I do not of course mean those grosser sins of swearing or of slandering: such things can never come from a Christian's mouth: I mean all that idle tattling

about our neighbour's business, which is commonly called gossiping. This gossiping has been too frequent a fault among Christians, even from the earliest times: for we find St. Paul reproving the tattlers and busybodies, who wander about from house to house, speaking things which they ought not.

These two kinds of faults then,—or let me rather call them plainly sins, sins of the temper, and sins of the tongue,—are often met with in those who are only three parts leavened. Now when such persons are aware of these sins of theirs, if they grieve over them, and strive against them, and pray to God to enable them to keep a better guard over their tongues and tempers, the leaven is still working in their hearts; and we may hope that with the help of the Holy Spirit, they may go on still further toward perfection. But too often this is not the case. Too often persons sit down satisfied with the progress they have already made, and measure themselves with the ungodly, instead of measuring themselves by Christ's perfect law. Too often they are content with being better than those about them, and think there can be no great harm in being a little fretful, or a little sullen at times, or in speaking a little harshly of a neighbour, or in busying themselves with other people's affairs. These and the like faults according to them are only natural infirmities, which there is little or no need to correct, and which God will not be quick to notice. Now this is a great mistake. God is not quick to mark those faults which we grieve over and fight against: on the contrary, he has promised to forgive all such, and to help us to get the better of them. But the moment we indulge ourselves in any one sin, and cease to strive against it, that moment it becomes a presumptuous sin; and no presumptuous sin is small. With regard to the particular faults in question, hear what St. James says of the tongue: "If any one

among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, he deceiveth his own heart, and his religion is vain" (i. 26). Can this be a small fault, which is enough to make the whole of a man's religion good for nothing? So necessary is it to set a watch over our mouth, and to keep the door of our lips, lest we be guilty of offending with our words.

And as it behoves a Christian to put a bridle on his tongue, so must he do his best to put a bridle on his temper. Nor is it enough to bridle our tempers; we must also strive to change their nature. If ye be led of the Spirit, says St. Paul, if ye are under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and sow to the Spirit; that is, walk as Christ would have you, and cherish those graces and dispositions which belong to the children of God. And which are they? St. Paul reckons them up in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians: among them are love, joy, peace, gentleness, and meekness. Who then dares say of Christ's religion that it is a harsh, sour, unpleasant thing? It is not religion that makes men harsh and sour, but the want of it. The harshness and sourness only shew that the fruit is not yet ripe. Truly Christian tempers, those tempers which are thoroughly leavened by the Spirit, so far from being harsh and sour, are the sweetest and gentlest that can be seen. I speak from my own observation: for I have known some such persons myself, persons in whose company it was scarcely possible to be, without feeling that one was breathing the very air of Christ's kingdom. But if this perfection can be attained, every follower of Christ is bound to strive after it: and how far are they from the full growth of the Gospel, whose temper and tongues are still unleavened! Truly, notwithstanding the progress they may have made, those who are only three parts leavened are still too far from the kingdom of God.

Thus have I described to you four classes of men, all calling themselves Christians, all perhaps thinking themselves safe, and yet all coming far short of that total leavening, which alone proves the love and the fear of God to hold their rightful sway over a man's heart. Therefore it becomes each of us to ask ourselves very seriously, "Do I belong to any of these four classes? and to which of them? Have I such a practical sense of my duty to God, that I may venture to deem myself three parts leavened? Have I merely a sense of the seemliness of religion, and so am only half leavened? Have I nothing but a wish and a feeling about the matter? and am I only a quarter leavened? Or am I in that worst state of all, in which the leaven has not yet begun to work?" In one or other of these four states many of every congregation may assuredly be numbered. Let each of you ask himself, "In which of these states am I?" that, thus comparing what you are, with what you ought to be, you may be better enabled to set about correcting and amending what is amiss in you.

But perhaps some of you may be inclined to say, "Can a man be so very perfect as all this? Are no allowances to be made for the weakness of human nature?" I answer, a man can be as perfect as this; because many have been so. Nay, many, I trust, who are as perfect as this, are now alive. And they would be the very first to tell you, that even they need all the allowances, all the mercy, all the grace of Jesus Christ. They would be the first to tell you of themselves, "We feel how very far short we come of that perfection which Jesus has set before us: we feel how far short we fall of that command of his, Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." For this is the true standard, which we should set before us and endeavour to reach, the goodness and righteousness and loving-kindness and purity of God, as shewn to us in his blessed Son. That

Son was the express image of his Father's excellency: so that the more we become like the Son, the more we shall be like the Father. But how is it possible for us to become like the Son of God, until our hearts, and minds, and words, and thoughts, and wishes, are fully leavened with the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of holiness and love?

The only remaining question is, How are we to get this precious and all-hallowing leaven, which is to change the dross of our natures into gold? First, I would have you search for it in the New Testament. The words of Jesus and of his apostles are the true leaven, which you are to apply to your hearts. But it is not enough to put leaven to the flour, unless we also knead it into the flour, and mix them well together. So it is not enough to store our memories with the leaven of God's word, unless we work it thoroughly and diligently into our hearts, by self-examination and by prayer. The Bible and other godly books teach you what you ought to be: let self-examination shew you what you are: and then compare the two together. Some people have a dread of self-examination, as if it were a very difficult and frightful thing: and difficult it certainly is, if a person puts it off, until he finds that in a single day perhaps he has to reckon up the sins of years. But if you would practise it regularly, nothing can be easier. Is it not easy to ask oneself, when one goes to bed, "Have I prayed to God heartily, or thought of him all day? Have I behaved to my neighbour as I would have him behave to me? I made a bargain to-day with such a man: did I make it on such terms as I should have thought fair, had I been in his place? I had to do such a piece of work for my master: did I do it as I would have done it, had I been working for myself? I had a quarrel with such a one this morning: was the fault mine or his? Did I say anything to provoke him? Did I remember that a soft answer turneth

away wrath? Was I slow to take offence, and quick to forgive it?"

Look thus at yourselves every night, my brethren, by the bright and piercing light of the Gospel. Carry the lamp of God's law in your hands, and search through every corner of your hearts. Never lay your head on your pillow without doing so: for in this sense also most assuredly sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. Cast your thoughts over what you have done, and compare it with what you ought to have done. Think what you have been, and then think what Christ was. After such an examination you will never be able to close your eyes, until you have fallen on your knees, and besought God to send his Holy Spirit, to circumcise what is still uncircumcised in you, and to leaven what is still unleavened.

VII.

THE ANGELS TEXT.

LUKE ii. 14.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

SUCH was the text of the angels on the night of our Saviour's birth; and to that text our Saviour's life furnished the sermon. For it was a life of holiness and devotion to his Father's service, a life spent in doing good to the bodies and souls of all around him; and it was ended by a death undergone on purpose to reconcile man with God, and to set earth at peace with heaven. Here is a practical sermon on the angels text, the best of all sermons, a sermon not of words, but deeds. Whoever will duly study that practical sermon, whoever with a teachable, inquiring heart will study the accounts of our Saviour's words and actions handed down in the four Gospels, will need little else to enlighten him in the way of godliness. Nevertheless, since it has pleased God that faith should come by hearing, and hearing by the multitude of preachers, I will say a few words to you on each of the heads into which this, the angels text, divides itself.

The first words of it are, Glory to God! and a most weighty lesson may we draw for ourselves, from finding the

angels put that first. A world is redeemed. Millions on millions of human beings are rescued from everlasting death. Is not this the thing uppermost in the angels' thoughts? Is not this mighty blessing bestowed on man the first thing that they proclaim? No, it is only the second thing: the first thing is, Glory to God! Why so? Because God is the giver of this salvation; nay, is himself the Saviour, in the person of the only-begotten Son. Moreover because in heavenly minds God always holds the first place, and they look at everything with a view to him. But if this was the feeling of the angels, it is clear we cannot be like angels until the same feeling is uppermost with us also. Would we become like them, we must strive to do God's will as it is done in heaven; that is, because it is God's will and because we are fully persuaded that whatever he wills must needs be the wisest and best and rightest thing to do, whether we can see the reasons of it or not. We must have God ever in our thoughts, just as most men have themselves ever in their thoughts. I do not mean that we should be always considering what God is like; any more than a selfish man is always considering what he himself is like. But the selfish man does everything with a view to self, to his own pleasure, to his own interest, to his own profit, and convenience, and no more dreams of crossing his own wishes, or his own will, than of cutting and maiming his body. This, you must be well aware, is the way most men look to themselves. Now I would have you look to God exactly in the same manner. But why say, *I* would have you? The Bible would have you, Jesus Christ would have you, make a habit of trying to obey and to please God in everything, and thereby offering and devoting to him all your daily doings. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, you should do all to God's glory. Then will you be like the angels who began their text with, Glory to God!

The next branch of the text is, Peace on earth. Our Saviour is especially called the Prince of Peace, because his great purposes were to bring down peace to man, and to plant and foster peace within man. He brought down peace to man; for he came with a message of free pardon from the Father to proclaim that God was willing to reconcile the world to himself, and would not impute their trespasses to men, if they would only turn to him, and believe in him. Had not Jesus brought us this blessed message, he would not have been the Messiah. For it was prophesied of him in the Psalms, that he should speak peace to his people, and to his saints (lxxxv. 8); and again in the prophet Zechariah, "He shall speak peace to the heathen" (ix. 10); and more strongly still in that sublime passage of Isaiah, where the prophet says, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God: speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem; and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished." Here is a plain proclamation of peace: for the warfare is said to be accomplished, or to be at an end. But when war is over, peace begins. This however is not all. The prophet adds how the war was to end: "her iniquity is pardoned." From these last words we learn that the war is a war with God; and that he puts a stop to it by a pardon. Well then might the angels sing, Peace on earth! when He was appearing upon earth, who was the ambassador of peace with Heaven.

But Jesus was not content with proclaiming peace to man. He further made it one of his prime objects to plant and foster peace within man. Peace was his legacy to his apostles. "My peace I leave with you," were his words to them the night he was betrayed. But what kind of peace? Truly every kind which man can enjoy: peace of conscience, such as a man enjoys, who knows his sins to be forgiven: peace of heart, such as a father may feel even in the hour of his bitterest sorrow, if he knows that the child, whom death

has just taken away, is only sleeping, as the daughter of Jairus slept, and that Christ will hereafter come to wake him; peace of a mind at ease about worldly matters, such as befits persons who have been taught that only one thing is really needful to a reasonable and immortal spirit, that our heart and treasure should both be in heaven, and that, with regard to our earthly wants and wishes, everything here below is in the hands of God, who cares for us, has no pleasure in afflicting us, and has promised to make all things work together for our good, if we will only love and fear him; lastly, peace and union between brethren, that we may all make up one body under Jesus Christ our head.

This is the fourfold peace which our Saviour came to plant and foster in the hearts of men. Now let each of us ask himself with all seriousness, do I feel anything of this godly peace? Ask yourselves, for instance, whether you have the peace arising out of the humble hope that your sins are pardoned. But remember, it is impossible to arrive at this, without being first convinced of sin. He that knows not the danger and the misery of being at war with God, will not feel the blessedness of being at peace with him. Ask yourselves again whether you have the peace of heart and mind growing out of a thorough trust in God through Christ. Do you look to him, as a child looks to its parent, for the fulfilment of all your wishes? When he thwarts you, do you bow down? When he chastens you, do you kiss the rod? When he blesses you, do you ascribe the blessing to the only Author of every good gift? When he takes away some object of earthly love, which has struck its roots so deep into you, it tears your very heart to part with it, do you,—instead of weakly sinking under the blow, or proudly hardening yourself against it, do you meekly sorrow over it, with a patient and hopeful sorrow, like men who know that the spirits of such as die in the Lord are blessed; and that

it is good for the departed to be taken away, though it is bitter for the survivor to be left behind?

There is still another kind of peace, concerning which you should examine yourselves: I mean, peace and union with your christian brethren. Let each ask himself whether he feels anything of that. It is no common good fellowship, it is no weak tie, that will suffice. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves: so says Christ. We are to love him, not in word only, but in deed and in truth: so says St. John. We are to be one with our christian brethren, so as all to make up one family. Nay, this is not enough. St. Paul's words are still stronger: he would have us all be as it were one body, one in interests, one in affections, one in heart and mind and soul and spirit. This can only be brought about by our emptying ourselves of ourselves, that the love of Christ may flow into us and fill us all with the same affections and desires. Have we thus emptied ourselves? But it is useless to ask the question. Of course we have not. This is the last and highest step towards christian perfection, which a man is allowed to take here below: and of course we have not taken it. But have we ever so much as made the attempt? Have we ever begun to fight against our own selfishness? Have we ever determined to deny ourselves, to mortify ourselves, to esteem others better than ourselves, to look not only to our own feelings and interests, but also to those of others? Have we ever begun to seek this peace and union, far as we may be from having attained to it?

If we have not done so, if our hearts cannot bear us true witness that we have any of these different kinds of peace within us, what share have we in Christ's coming? What good is it to us that peace on earth has been proclaimed, if we are still lying under God's wrath, still a prey to eating cares, still tossed about and torn by raging passions, so that

our hearts are full of war? The same holy book, which tells us in one place that the angels proclaimed peace on earth, tells us likewise in another place, "there is no peace, saith God, to the wicked." Yet, brethren, though Christ may have failed on all former occasions to bring home peace to some of you, let him not fail of doing so now. He has come to you once more to-day. Once more have we been permitted to hear the story of his birth, the message of the angels, the song of the heavenly choir. We have followed the shepherds to the humble stable; and our souls have looked on the wondrous babe, the Son of God, the maker of the world, lying, where none of you would suffer a child of yours to lie, among the cattle in a manger, and all to bring us peace. Will you again refuse the precious gift, which he has come from beyond the stars to offer you? Accept it this time for his sake, for your own sakes. Begin now, whatever you may have done heretofore, to seek his peace, and to pursue it.

There is a third part of the angels text,—namely, "Goodwill to men:" and a very important part it is. For it sets forth the ground of our salvation. It was no excellency or merit of ours, that drew our Saviour down from heaven: for we were full of nothing but demerits. It was the wretchedness of our fallen state, the seeing how impossible it was for us ever to recover by our own strength, that moved Almighty God in his infinite lovingkindness to send his Son to rescue and redeem us. He saw that there was none to save; therefore his own arm, the arm of God, brought us salvation; the righteousness of God was manifested to sustain us. Well then might the angels proclaim goodwill to man at Christ's birth, since his birth was so great and wonderful a showing forth of God's goodwill to us. For herein, as St. Paul tells us, "God commendeth, or showeth forth, his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

(Rom. v. 8.) To the same purport are the words of St. John: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John iv. 10.)

But though this love of God for his sinful creatures is worthy of all gratitude and praise, the goodwill declared in the angels text means something more than mere love. The word, which we translate goodwill, is a word very full of meaning, and signifies that mixture of goodness and kindness and wisdom, which leads to good and wise plans. The goodwill then in the angels text is no other than the great and merciful purpose of our redemption: and had one of the angels enlarged on the text, we may conceive him expressing himself after the following manner: "This night, O man, is our Father and your Father carrying into effect that wonderful plan, which he has prepared ever since the fall of Adam. The prophecy to Adam, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head,—the prophecy to Abraham, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed,—the prophecy of Malachi, that the Sun of Righteousness should arise with healing on his wings,—these and all the other prophecies which speak of the Messiah's coming, are now fulfilled. The eternal counsels of the Lord are now about to take effect. His faithfulness, his truth, his righteousness, his mercy are coming down from heaven to dwell among men, that men may see with their bodily eyes, and hear with their bodily ears, the goodness of their Father and their God, who has brought to light a marvellous way of reconciling his justice with his mercy, and of approving himself the eternal and implacable enemy of sin, at the very moment when he is most forgiving to repentant sinners. It is this union of goodness, of wisdom, and of mercy, that we now proclaim and announce to you, under the name of goodwill to men."

Now to apply this part of the angels text to ourselves, have we any proper sense and feeling of this goodwill? If we have, we shall be humble; inasmuch as we are saved, not by our merits, but by the love of God, in spite of our manifold demerits. We shall be thankful; for surely kindness like this ought to fill our hearts with gratitude. God's love toward us should beget in us love toward him. Above all, we should be full of faith, trusting that he who has begun so excellent a work, will bring the same to good effect,—that he who for our sakes gave his only Son to live a poor and humble life, and to die a painful and shameful death, will together with that Son freely give us all things. We cannot suppose it was a pleasure to the Son of God to suffer the pains of infancy, the labours and mortifications and trials of manhood, the pangs of a cruel death. It was no pleasure to him to quit the glories of heaven, in order to dwell in lowliness and contempt. Why then did he undergo all this? From goodwill, to save man. And think you he will leave this salvation imperfect and so render his incarnation, and birth, and human life and death, of no avail? O no! he must desire to finish his work; he must be anxious to make up the crown he has toiled and bled for, by placing in it all the jewels, all the souls he can gather. He will never be wanting to us, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

Thus have I spoken to you on the angels text, and in so doing have spoken of man's salvation. The end of the whole is God's glory; the means is peace on earth; the sole motive is goodness and lovingkindness to us miserable sinners. But there are still three words in the text, which I have not noticed. The angels did not simply say, Glory to God; but, Glory to God *in the highest*, that is, in heaven. Here is a wonderful, a glorious, a soul-sustaining scene opened to us. The angels in the very presence of God are moved by our sufferings and our redemption. Even to them,

with all their knowledge of God, and his divine works, even to them, that the Word should stoop to be made flesh, unfolded new views of the eternal Father's goodness, and furnished a fresh theme for their songs of praise. Even the angels strike their golden harps at the joyful news of man's salvation. Shall they glorify God for his goodness to us, and shall we forget to glorify him for his goodness to ourselves? Shall they rejoice over us, and feel for us, and shall we be so insensible, so deaf-hearted, as neither to rejoice nor to feel for ourselves,—for our escape from sin and hell,—for our restoration to the hope of heaven? Our Saviour threatened the impenitent Jews, that the men of Nineveh should rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them. A more glorious and awful set of witnesses, if we are impenitent, will be arrayed against us Christians. The very angels will testify against us, and condemn us: because, when they had proclaimed glory to God in the highest, he was forgotten and dishonoured among men; because, when they had announced the coming of peace on earth, men rejected the blessed offer, and remained at enmity with God, and with themselves, and with each other; because, when they had assured us of goodwill from God to men, our bosoms did not echo the answering cry of love and gratitude and obedience from man to God. Brethren, may none of us be among the wretched multitude, against whom this testimony will be offered! Let us bethink ourselves in time, and be reconciled to God in time, that, as Jesus on this day brought the Godhead down from heaven to earth, so, by the work of his Spirit on our willing and obedient hearts, he may raise us up from earth to heaven.

VIII.

THE EPIPHANY;

OR,

FAR AND NIGH.

EPHESIANS ii. 12, 13.

> At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

THESE words were spoken by St. Paul to the converts he had made at Ephesus, who, before he preached to them, and brought them to a knowledge of the truth, were in the miserable state here described. They were without Christ: they were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel: they were strangers from the covenants of promise: they were without hope, and without God. This was their wretched plight, so long as they were far off. But through the grace of God, who was pleased to send his servant Paul to declare the Gospel of salvation to them, their condition underwent a wonderful change. They were made nigh by the blood of Christ. By that blood they were reconciled to God: they were made partakers in the covenant of promise, fellow-citizens with the saints, became

entitled to all the glorious privileges of God's people, and were admitted to dwell in his house, and to share in the blessings and honours of his family.

It is of this marvellous and happy change, that St. Paul reminds the Ephesians in the text. To make them feel their blessedness as Christians, he sets before them their wretchedness as Gentiles, or heathens; when, as we read in the book of Acts, they were worshippers of the great goddess Diana, and of the statue which in their fond conceits they imagined to have fallen from heaven: that is, they were blind idolaters, and bowed down to gods that were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Nor was this the case with the people of Ephesus alone, before the coming of Christ. The Jews indeed had been favoured from the earliest times with a knowledge of the one true God: and through their teaching, in almost every great city there was a congregation, larger or smaller, of devout men, or proselytes, as they were called, who had left the idols of their fathers, and worshipped the great Jehovah. But with these exceptions the whole earth was lying dead in darkness and in wickedness. Even the city of Athens, which among the heathens passed for the light of the world, was wholly given up to idolatry. The account which we read in the Epistle to the Romans applied, under one form or other, to all the Gentiles: "they had changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and even to creeping things." Their souls were bound to the footstool of any dumb idol that chance had set up among them.

Why do I speak of these things to you? For the same reason which led St. Paul to speak of them to the Ephesians: to remind you of the fearful depths of evil, out of which through God's mercy you have been brought, that

your hearts may be stirred to thankfulness, and that, feeling how much you owe to God for his goodness, you may be roused to do your best towards paying off your great debt of love to him, by giving yourself up to his service, and striving to walk before him in holiness and righteousness. For we too are not of the seed of Abraham after the flesh: we too by birth are Gentiles, as the Ephesians were: and if the mercy of God had not been revealed to our forefathers, as well as to them,—if our forefathers, having sometimes been far off, had not been made nigh by the blood of Christ,—we at this day should still be what they were, and what so many millions of idolaters in all quarters of the world are even now: we should be aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise: we should be without hope, and without God, even in the midst of God's own world. But, blessed be God! it pleased him to call our fathers to the knowledge of the truth in Christ Jesus. Nay, it has pleased him to enrich them with one spiritual blessing after another, and to exalt them with religious privileges and religious knowledge, not merely above the heathens, but, I might almost say, above every other christian people. Moreover they have been allowed to hand down those religious privileges, a rich and precious inheritance, the richest and most precious of all earthly inheritances, to us, their children; and we are now enjoying them. At least it is our own fault, our own sin, if we are not.

Thoughts of this kind can never be out of season; for it can never be out of season to meditate on the great mercies that God has vouchsafed to us. But they are more especially fitted for the festival we are this day celebrating. To-day is the feast of the Epiphany, as it is called, that is, of the manifestation or shewing forth,—a feast kept in remembrance of the great and glorious day, when Christ was first

manifested and shewn to the Gentiles. In the Gospel for the day we read how it pleased God, by means of a wonderful star, to make the birth of Jesus known to the wise men, and how they came from their own country in the East to Jerusalem, and how the words on their lips, when they got there, were, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him." Nor did they come empty-handed. According to the prophecy in the 72nd Psalm, that the kings of Arabia and Saba should bring gifts, they had brought the riches of those very countries, which abound in gold and spices, to offer to the new-born King. And where, and how did they find him? In a splendid palace, in the midst of a mighty city, surrounded by guards, with the lords and ladies of the land taking pride in waiting upon him? He was in a small house, in the petty village of Bethlehem, with nobody to nurse or tend him but his virgin mother. Had they arrived a little sooner, they would have found him, as the shepherds did, in a stable. But probably some kind-hearted person had been moved with pity for the Virgin's forlorn condition, and had taken her in with her babe: for we read, that, when the wise men came to the spot over which the star stood still, they went into the house, and saw—what?—only a young child, with its mother, holding it in her arms, or sitting by it, and perhaps praying over it, with the humble anxious fervour of a pious mother's prayer. Now was the time when the wise men showed themselves to be most truly wise. They were wise, after the wisdom of their own country, when they were standing night after night on their watch-tower, following the stars in their glorious courses. They were wise, when, at the sight of the new star,—which reminded them, it may be, of the great prophecy uttered by Balaam, that a star should come out of Jacob, and a sceptre should rise out of

Israel,—they undertook a long and weary journey to offer their homage to the promised king. But wise as they were at the beginning of their journey, their wisdom shone still brighter at the end of it. They shewed the greatest wisdom, —because they shewed the greatest faith,—when they had reached the house and entered in. How many would have been scandalized and shocked at the mean appearance of the infant! How many would have been troubled with doubts, and would have begun to say within themselves, "Surely there must be some mistake here: this child can never be born a king!" How many again would have felt their pride hurt, and would have been half angry, half ashamed, at having taken such a long journey to see a poor child in a cottage! But the wise men felt none of this false pride, none of this false shame. They knew that they might trust the star: the star and its Maker could not lie. Therefore they trusted it to the utmost, notwithstanding that all which met their eyes would have led them to think its tidings could not be true. When they saw it stop over a cottage at Bethlehem, mean as the place was, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy; and when they were come in, and saw the young child, with Mary his mother, they fell down,—these princes and wise men fell down in the lowliness of their wisdom;—and although he whom they beheld was reputed to be nothing more than the son of a carpenter, yet under his form they worshipped the Saviour and the Maker of the world. "And they opened their treasures, and presented gifts to him, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh;" thereby fulfilling the prophecy in the 72nd Psalm, that "to him shall be given of the gold of Arabia," and that, which you heard in the lesson from Isaiah, that "they from Sheba shall bring gold and incense."

But to return to the main subject of my sermon: why is the story of these wise men of such interest and importance to us, that the Church has thought fit that a day in every

year should be set apart to keep alive the memory of Christ's manifestation to them? Because in manifesting himself to the wise men, Our Saviour manifested himself to the Gentiles. They were the first-fruits of the Gentile world, who came to the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Therefore, in rejoicing, as the Church does on this day, that God was pleased, by the leading of a star, to manifest Jesus to the Gentiles, we should likewise feel a thankful joy that he was manifested to our forefathers, and through them has been made known to us. We should bear in mind that we have had Christ shewn to us, not in his cradle, but, I might almost say, in our own cradles. Almost from our cradles upward have we been taught to know Christ, and to love him. We have had no toilsome journey to take in search of him: he is near to us, even at our very doors. We have had no questions to ask, like the wise men, when they came to Jerusalem, in order to find out the King of the Jews. Go east, or west, or north, or south, into every corner of this favoured land; in every parish you will find a church, and in thousands of cottages you will find New Testaments, to shew you the plain straight way to Jesus, the King of the world. Nor is our faith put to the trial of seeing our King in the guise of a poor infant. The same book, which tells us that Jesus was laid in a manger, and brought up under the roof of a village carpenter, tells us also that he was the image of the invisible God, that he was the first-born before every creature, and that, as a recompense for his taking our nature upon him, and submitting to the death of the cross, God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, that at his name every knee should bow, not only in earth, but in heaven also, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. ii. 9—11.) All these things we have heard from our very

childhood. Christ has never been made known to us, except as a Prince and a Saviour, who came down to earth for a time on the errand of our redemption, but whose true and right home is heaven, where he is now sitting at the right hand of God.

Is it a small thing, my brethren, to have had all this revealed to us? Remember, "many prophets and righteous men have desired to see the things which we see, and have not seen them." (Matt. xiii. 17.) Yet to us they have been made known from the hour when we began to talk. Without our seeking, they have come to us. They have been forced upon us. We could not shut our eyes and ears to them if we would. Is it a small thing to have been made nigh to God, by the blood of his only Son?—we, whose fathers at one time were far off, and neither knew God, nor wished to know him. Just think for a few moments, out of what a state we have been delivered, by being called to the knowledge of our God and Saviour,—by being born here, in this Christian Protestant land, instead of under heathen darkness.

We should have been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. It has pleased Almighty God to set up a spiritual kingdom upon earth, and to make gracious promises to all the people of his kingdom, that is, to every member of his Church. He has entered into a covenant with them by sacrifice, even by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Now would it not be a misery to have been shut out from God's earthly kingdom? to have no share in God's promises? to be excluded from the covenant which he has made with his people and his servants? Would not this be a grievous misery? My belief is, that we cannot in this life fathom all the depths of this misery. We know, and may understand, how much worse it is to be born a slave, than to be born free,—how much worse it must be to be born a savage, than to

come into life and be bred up in a civilized, orderly, quiet land. This we may all of us in some measure understand. But the woe it would be to a man to be born a heathen, instead of a Christian, we cannot fully make out, until we are let in to see the secrets of eternity.

Still there are two things mentioned by St. Paul, which may give us some notion of the wretched forlorn state of such as are far off without Christ. He tells us, that they are without hope, and without God. So too should we have been, if we had been born heathens. If the star of the Gospel had not shone in the eyes of our fathers, and called them to worship Christ, we too should have been born without hope and without God. Now cast in your minds, how much would you strike off from every good man's happiness, if you took away his hope and his God from him? Surely there is no one here, who, however faulty his practice may be, would consent to part with his hope, and to give up his knowledge of God, that he might go and be a king among the heathens. So that the poorest man in a christian land is infinitely better off than the richest and most powerful in the countries where Christ is not known. For they who are far off and without Christ, are doomed to live without those hopes, which are far more precious than the crown of a king, and without that knowledge of God, which is far mightier than the sceptre of a king. Being without Christ, they are without God. For it is only through Christ that we can come to God, even to know him, much more to love him, and to obey him. All who are without Christ must needs be without God. And what is man without God? He is like a ship tossed about on a stormy sea, without chart or compass. The ship drifts as the waves carry it: the night is dark: the pilot knows not which way to steer: he may be close to rocks and quicksands: perhaps a flash of lightning falls on a rock, or he hears the waves breaking

over it. But how shall he escape? or how prepare to meet the danger? Shall he trust in Providence? What Providence has he to trust in? Poor man! he is without God. Shall he throw out an anchor? But he has no anchor: he wants the best and only fast anchor,—hope, the anchor of the soul. Such is the state of man, when he is far off, without a God to trust in, without hope to comfort and support him. But give the same man a true and lively faith in Christ,—tell him of a merciful and loving Father, who careth for us, and would have us cast all our cares upon him,—shew him that hope which is firm to the end; and straightway you make a happy man of him. You give him a course to steer: you give him a chart and compass to guide him; you give him an anchor which will enable him to withstand the buffeting of every storm: you insure him against shipwreck; and you assure him of a blessed haven, where at length he will arrive and be at rest.

Such is a slight outline of the difference between Gentiles, or heathens, and Christians,—between those who are far off, and those who are nigh: or rather, to speak more correctly and more profitably, such may be the difference between them. But as, in receiving the body and blood of Christ, the danger is declared to be great, if we receive the same unworthily, so is it with the privileges of the christian covenant. The danger attending them is likewise great, if we receive them unthankfully and unworthily,—if we put them to a bad use, or to no use,—if, being born nigh to Christ, we choose to depart from him like the Prodigal Son into a far country,—if, bearing the name of Christ, we live the life of heathens.

The danger, if we live thus, is great. For in so living we are guilty of the body and blood of Christ our Saviour. It is by the blood of Christ, the apostle expressly says, that we are made nigh. If then, having been bought at such a

price, and brought out of a world where we were without God, to the very foot of God's throne, we throw away the inestimable advantages thus vouchsafed to us,—if we run off from the foot of God's throne, and go and hide ourselves in one of those caverns of sin which are yawning on every side of us,—do we not shew that we neither prize the privileges obtained for us, nor regard the price which Jesus paid for them? Assuredly we thereby prove that we think no more of the blood of Christ, wherewith we have been sanctified, than if it were so much common blood. We prove, to use the awful language of the apostle, that we count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing. (Heb. x. 29.)

Such behaviour moreover is utterly inexcusable. The heathen may plead that he has rarely, if ever, heard of Christ, and that, having been bred up in a different religion, he had many strong prejudices to fight against and overcome, before he could embrace the Gospel: and these pleas, so far as they are brought forward in sincerity, God, we may be sure, will mercifully listen to. The heathen, I say, may plead this excuse. But we,—what excuse have we to plead? we, who have been born beneath the full sunshine of Gospel truth,—we, who have been bred up, as it were, in the innermost chamber of God's earthly temple,—we, who have been mercifully placed within the skirts of Christ's glory. What excuse can we plead for not believing in him, for not loving him, for not obeying him? You cannot,—none of you can plead ignorance. In the New Testament you have the best teachers that ever lived, the Son of God himself, and his chosen apostles. You have had the Scriptures read to you, you have had them explained to you, from your very childhood; and they contain the words of eternal life. Ignorance then you can in no wise plead: for none need be ignorant, unless they choose it. Will any of you plead your small capacity? your want of

opportunity? To ensure you plenty of opportunity, God has kept one day for himself out of every seven, on purpose that the very busiest, that even those who are forced to work all day long for their bread, may have an abundance of time for learning to know his will. As for dullness of understanding, it is not a sharp or strong head that is wanted to make a Christian, but a sincere and honest heart. Only be earnest in seeking the true and right way: you will have no difficulty in finding it.

But perhaps you will say that your nature is weak, and prone to sin. True, most true, it is so: and therefore the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, has deigned to promise that he will come down from heaven to us, and dwell with us, and strengthen us against all our infirmities. However weak we may be in ourselves, surely he can make us strong enough. Away then with all such excuses! Those who do not serve Christ in this country, do not, because they will not. He has called them,—time after time he has called them;—but they will not come. He has placed them near him: but they will not stay. They will not accept eternal life from him on the gracious terms on which he has offered it. No, they cry in their madness, let us have hell instead. No, they still cry, when Christ is set before them, we will not have this man to reign over us. Our lusts shall reign over us; our vices shall reign over us; our enmities shall reign over us; covetousness shall reign over us: there is nothing so paltry, so vile, so foul, so hateful, but we will set it up to be our king, rather than the King of heaven. What is this but sinning with our eyes open? What is it but crucifying the Son of God, and not the Son of man? What is it but saying, like the Jews, Not Jesus, but Barabbas?

My brethren, it is an awful thing to slight the gifts, and to trample on the blessings of the living God. As sure as

God liveth, it shall not be done for ever with impunity. He has chosen us Englishmen, as he chose the Jews of old: he has given us a birthright in the commonwealth of Israel: he has bound himself to us by the covenant of promise: he has made us nigh by the blood of his Son. . He has enriched us with every opportunity of learning his will. He has ordained that no hand of man shall hinder us in doing it. He has scattered the seed of his word through the land with an abundance elsewhere unheard of. Blessed be his name for all his blessings to us! If we despise them however, if we turn our backs on them, if we defile the blood of the covenant, by mingling it with our sacrifices to the idols of our lusts,—God's judgments on Jerusalem will then be but a weak type of his more fearful judgments upon us: upon us, I say,—upon you, and me, and whosoever may be guilty of refusing this great salvation. Therefore, my beloved brethren, do not reject the proffered mercies of your God, which, being rejected, turn to curses. But put them to a right use. Make them the seeds and the forerunners of still greater blessings, which he is waiting and longing to bestow on you. As you have been brought nigh to Christ, strive daily to come nearer and nearer to him; nor slacken your efforts until you have become one with him in his heavenly glory.

IX.

REPENTANCE.

GENESIS xix. 17.

Escape for thy life: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

THERE is a time to laugh, says the Preacher: and there is also a time to weep. This we all know to be true with regard to the affairs of this world. Among the events that befall us in the course of our lives, there are some that make the heart glad, and others that wring it with anguish. So too in our spiritual life, in the matters that concern our souls, are there seasons for godly joy, and seasons likewise for godly sorrow. For many are the engines which God sets at work in order to bring us to him. Sometimes he draws us toward him with the cords of love, which have mostly the strongest hold on gentle spirits. At other times he sends judgments and visitations of various kinds to warn us, that a wholesome fear may be wrought in our minds, and that we may flee in time from the wrath to come. When we look at what God has done and is ever doing for us, at the many marvellous proofs of his mercy, the many glorious offers of salvation set before us, we may well be joyful in the Lord, and serve him with gladness. When on the other hand we turn our eyes inward, and consider how

we have behaved toward God,—when we think of the deaf ear we have so often turned to those offers of salvation, of the stubbornness with which we have shut our eyes against those proofs of mercy,—our sins and our ingratitude may well cover us with sorrow and shame.

Hence it is right and fitting that we should have seasons set apart more especially for spiritual joy, when our chief employment may be thanksgiving to God for all that he has done for us, and seasons for spiritual sorrow, wherein we may confess our sins, and mourn over them, and repent of them. Therefore the Church has appointed set times, when, as the year rolls round, these duties are to be brought solemnly before us. One great season for holy joy and thanksgiving is Christmas, which we have lately passed through. The chief season for sorrow and repentance is Lent, on which we are now entering. Such then being the purpose of the Church in ordaining that the forty days of Lent should be observed in a particular manner,—repentance being the feeling which she designs should at this season be uppermost in the hearts of her members,—it behoves us to consider what repentance is, and why it is of such importance, that so large a portion of every year should be set apart for it.

What then is repentance? You will perhaps tell me, it is the being sorry for having done wrong. This however is far from enough. The apostle speaks of "a godly sorrow which worketh repentance;" so that repentance must be something different from sorrow, even from a godly sorrow. It is the fruit of a godly sorrow. When there is anything about us, that afflicts us and makes us grieve, we naturally wish, if possible, to be quit of it; and the more grievous our affliction, the stronger is our desire to get rid of that which causes it. Accordingly, if we are stirred with a hearty and godly sorrow for having turned away from God, and

given ourselves up to sin, we must needs desire to forsake our sins, and to turn from them to God. This, at the very least, is necessary to make up anything that can claim to be called repentance. When the angel came to Lot in Sodom, what did he tell him? To grieve over the sins of Sodom? Had Lot done no more than this, he would have perished in the destruction of Sodom. The angel bade him flee out of Sodom, and escape for his life: he bade him flee to the mountain, lest he should be consumed. He who sincerely and heartily repents of his sins, will not be content to tarry in the midst of them, nor even in the plain in their neighbourhood: he will endeavour to escape to the mountain; he will strive to climb up God's hill, the holy hill of Sion. It is a very common, and a very sad mistake, for people to fancy that, when they are sorry for their sins, when they abuse sin, and condemn it, and regret that they have fallen into it, they are repenting. But it is not so. We may speak ill of a thing with our lips; and yet our hearts may cleave to it all the while. So long as we continue in sin, so long at least as we do not strive to get out of it, there is no jot of true repentance in our hearts. For the repentance which is wrought by a godly sorrow, is a repentance unto salvation: but a repentance which did not move us to forsake our sins, would be a repentance unto destruction. We should be destroyed along with them, even as Lot would have been destroyed if he had stayed in Sodom. Hear what the prophet Isaiah says, when he is exhorting the people to repentance. "Wash you; make you clean: put away the evil of your doings: cease to do evil; learn to do well" (i. 16). In like manner John the Baptist, when he preached repentance, laid the stress of his sermon on the fruits of repentance. It was not enough, he said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, to come and be baptized, and to confess their sins: they were also to bring forth fruits meet for

repentance: for every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit,—I pray you, brethren, mark his words: he does not say, every tree which brings forth bad fruit, but every tree which does not bring forth good fruit,—every barren tree, every tree that bears nothing, is to be cut down, just as much as the vine spoken of by the prophet, which brought forth wild and poisonous grapes. Both are to be hewn down by the axe of justice: both are to be cast into the fire.

Indeed, the very words in the original, which in our Bible are rendered by the English words *repent* and *repentance*,—the very words by which the Evangelists describe the preaching of the Baptist, and that of our Lord himself,—mean far more than is usually understood by the English words that answer to them. The original word means a change of mind, a change of heart, a change of thought and of feeling. Therefore when you read or hear any of our Saviour's gracious promises of forgiveness to those who will repent, you must understand them as applying solely to those who have begun to lay aside their old thoughts about sin, and to look at it, not according to the evil customs of the world, but according to the law of God. So long as a man asks, "What great harm can there be in this or that thing?" when God has forbidden it; so long as he says, "I am very sorry for what I do, but I can't help it;" so long as he comforts himself with the thought that he is no worse than other men;—so long is he only deceiving himself to his ruin, by applying Christ's promises of forgiveness to his own case. Christ's promises are to those whose minds are changed. Is that man's mind changed, who does not see the great harm, the shame, the guilt, the danger of disobeying God? Is that man's mind changed, who says he cannot help his sins? when Jesus Christ came from heaven on purpose to bring him help, and

to enable him to live unto righteousness. As for that habit of comparing ourselves with other men, and comforting ourselves if we find that we are not worse than they, among all the deadly snares which Satan is ever setting for souls, hardly any is more destructive, hardly any catches more victims, and entangles them in sin and death, than this very temptation by which he beguiles us into measuring ourselves among ourselves, and comparing ourselves one with another, instead of trying our lives and actions by the only true test, the word of God. In a word, unless we are heartily desirous to forsake sin,—and to forsake it too on right grounds, not because it may hurt our welfare in this world, but because it is hateful to God,—unless we do our best to flee from sin, it is a mere pretence to say that we repent. There may be momentary pangs of sorrow; there may be stings of remorse; there may be a fear of punishment; but, unless the remorse makes us hate sin, unless the fear makes us turn to God, unless the sorrow settles down into an earnest desire of leading pure and righteous lives in future, we are not among the number of those who have given heed to the cry calling them to repentance; and it will be no blessing to us that the kingdom of heaven is come.

This brings me to consider why we are to repent. Not on account of any pleasure or satisfaction found in the work of repentance itself. I will not conceal from you that the duty of repentance is neither easy nor pleasant. The very name given to the first day of Lent shows that this was not designed to be a season for gladness. It is called, as you know, Ash Wednesday; because on that day the Christians in former ages used to sprinkle their heads and cross their foreheads with ashes, saying one to another, "Remember, O man, that thou art ashes, and unto dust thou shalt return." To cover the head with ashes was regarded of old as a mark

of the deepest sorrow. Thus we read that Tamar in her grievous affliction put ashes on her head. Thus, when the wicked Haman had persuaded Ahasuerus to send forth a decree against the Jews, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes: and in every province there was great mourning among the Jews, fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. In like manner, when Jonah preached repentance to the people of Nineveh, the king arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And you cannot but remember our Saviour's words, in which he cries, "Woe to Chorazin! and woe to Bethsaida! for, if the mighty works done in them had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." Thus has repentance ever been deemed a thing sad and painful and humiliating; and thus, when we repent, must we too, like the king of Nineveh, strip off all the pride of our nature, all that the flesh and the eye delight in, to cast ourselves on the ground, and to cover ourselves with the bitter ashes of our former pleasures. Nor does our blessed Master ever speak of repentance except as a thing hard to flesh and blood. You remember his words about John the Baptist, the great preacher of repentance: "What went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft raiment? Behold they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses." The preacher of repentance is not among those who wear soft clothing. His dwelling is in the wilderness; and they who give heed to his preaching, must also go forth into the wilderness. They must deny all that they have hitherto been accustomed to pamper, and must forsake all wherewith they have hitherto pampered themselves. They must curb their tempers: they must fortify their inclinations: they must be content to fare without the comforts and indulgences to which they have been used all their lives.

Pains must be taken, sacrifices must be made, by all who would enter in at the strait gate. Restraints must be borne, self-denial must be practised, by all who desire to recover from the deadly disease of sin. It can hardly be necessary to remind you, what a tedious work it is to recover from a severe and dangerous illness,—what a long time it takes,—how much care is needed to keep us from falling back, and losing the little ground we have gained. In how many ways is the sick man compelled to deny himself! for instance, in abstaining wholly from strong drinks, and from certain meats, which, when he was well, did him no harm, but which will not suit his present weakly state. The remedies too are often painful, the medicines distasteful. All this care and abstinence the sick man may have to practise for months, until he has regained his strength. Nor is the recovery of the soul less difficult than that of the body: on the contrary, it is far more difficult, inasmuch as the malady is of far longer standing. It is far more difficult: it takes a longer time: it is still more liable to be interrupted by relapses: it requires a still more watchful self-restraint and self-denial.

The likeness between the diseases of the body and those of the soul will also supply us with an answer to the question which I put just now: why, if repentance be so painful, are we to repent? Were a man, who was lying on a bed of sickness, to be asked, why he sent for a physician,—why he took so much nauseous medicine,—why he did not eat and drink like other men,—would he be at a loss for an answer? Would he not say at once, "Because I wish to live, rather than to die; so I am taking the only means whereby I can hope to save my life?" Such should be the penitent sinner's answer, when asked why he is taking the bitter medicine of repentance. This question is very likely to be put to him at the outset, by his passions, which are not

used to be checked,—by his will, which grows outrageous at being curbed,—by his former companions, who are vexed to see him quitting, and thereby condemning them,—by every evil thing, in short, both within him and around him. When such a question is asked him, he too should answer, "Because I wish to live, rather than to die, to live for ever, rather than to die for ever." Nothing can be stronger than our Saviour's words on this point. If our right eye offend us, that is, if it tempt us to sin,—as numbers are tempted to sin by the lusts of the eye,—we are to pluck it out and cast it from us. If our right hand prove a temptation to us, we are to cut it off. And along with this command, so hard to flesh and blood, our Lord has been graciously pleased to tell us the reason why we are to obey it: because it is better for us to enter into life halt or maimed, or with one eye, than to be cast into everlasting fire with two legs, and two hands, and two eyes.

This, my brethren, is the reason why we are to repent: because, irksome as repentance may be, it is only through the strait gate that we can enter into life. Does any man think of doubting whether recovering from sickness is a good thing? Did any man in his senses ever blame another for choosing to get well at whatever cost and trouble, when he might have saved himself all this annoyance by letting himself be lifted out of bed into his coffin? for choosing to have a mortified leg cut off, when he might have kept it on, and become a corpse? Nay further: did any man in his right mind ever say, "It is true, I am very ill. Every day that I put off taking medicine, I grow worse, and there is less and less chance of my recovery. Notwithstanding I will delay getting well for another twelvemonth; and then I will set about it in good earnest?" If such language would be downright madness, with regard to the disorders of the body, how comes it to be less than madness when used of the

disorders of the soul? How comes it that so many think these mad thoughts, and speak these mad words, about repentance? How comes it that so many go on year after year putting off the time of taking the only medicine, which can restore us through God's help to our natural health, and make us ourselves again?

For man, as he now is, is not himself. He is not what God made him. God made him to lead a holy and godly life; and such is the life to which Jesus Christ came to restore him. This therefore is our true nature, the nature in which man was made, the nature which Christ came to restore. Sin however has become a kind of second nature to us. In an ancient story-book we read of a great warrior, who was persuaded through the malice of his enemy to put on a poisoned robe; and the robe stuck to his body, so that it was impossible to pull it off, without tearing off some of the flesh. It stuck to him as if it had been glued on; and the poison ate into his flesh, and killed him. Thus is it with sin. It cannot be torn off, without drawing blood from our souls: but if we let it remain on, it kills us. Therefore must we tear it off, without shrinking or flinching from the pain it may cost us to do so. We must escape to the mountain; because we are fleeing from Sodom; and because we cannot tarry in Sodom without being consumed by its fire.

It is impossible to press this point too strongly: so I will try to enforce what I have said by another parable. On the seashore, many of you must know, there are often rocks. Now suppose a man, walking among these rocks, and finding the stones painful to his feet, thinks he shall walk more easily and pleasantly on the smooth sand below. He quits the rocks, and goes down to the sands. The tide is out; the sea is calm; the waves are a long way off: there can be no danger: so he walks on. Presently the wind

begins to rise. Still there can be no danger: it is only rounding that jutting cliff: there is plenty of time; and then he will be safe. Meanwhile the sea comes on, gradually, gradually, wave after wave, like so many lines of horsemen in battle array riding one after the other. Every moment they advance a step or two; and before the man has got to the jutting cliff, he sees them dashing against its feet. What is he to do? On one side of him is a steep and rugged ledge of rocks; on the other side the sea, which the wind is lashing into a storm, is rushing toward him with all its might and fury. Would a man in such a plight think of losing another moment? Would he stop to consider, whether he should hurt his hands by laying hold of the sharp stones? Would not he strain every nerve to reach a place of safety, before the waves could overtake him? If his slothfulness whispered to him, "It is of no use; the ledge is very steep! you may fall back when you have got half-way; stay where you are; perhaps the wind may drop, or the waves may stop short; and so you will be safe here;" —if his slothfulness prompted such thoughts as these, would he listen to them? Would he not reply, "Hard as the task may be, it must be tried, or I am a dead man. God will not work a miracle in my behalf: he will not change the course of the tides, and put a new and strange bridle on the sea, to save me from the effects of my own laziness. I have still a few minutes left: let me make the most of them, and I may be safe: if they slip away, I must be drowned." This picture is not a mere piece of fancy. Many stories are told of the risks people have run by the coming in of the tide, when they were straying heedlessly along the sands. Some by great efforts, aided by God's good providence, have escaped. Others have perished miserably. Now the sinner is just in the situation of the man I have been speaking of. On one side of him is the steep ledge of

repentance; on the other the fiery waves of the bottomless pit are every moment rolling on toward him. Could his eyes be opened, as the eyes of Elisha's servant were, he would see those fiery waves already beginning to surround him. Is this a situation for a man to stop in? Will any one in such a plight talk about the difficulty of repentance? Let passion cry out, "It is hard to deny oneself:" faith must make answer, "It is harder to dwell amid endless burnings."

There is one great difference however between the man walking on the seashore, and the sinner loitering on the edge of the fiery lake. The former will try to climb the rocks, because they offer him a chance of escaping; but if we try to climb the ledge of repentance, our escape is certain, provided we begin in time. Jesus Christ himself is standing at the top of that ledge, crying to us, "Why will ye perish?" He stretches out his hands to us, to help us up: we have only to lay hold on them, and we are safe.

But then we must begin in time. If a man sets about climbing a steep cliff when he is young and active, and has the free use of his limbs, he has a great advantage: the old and the crippled are pretty sure to fail. So is it with repentance. The young can mount the hill, if they set about it in good earnest, with much less toil. But they who are old in sin, they whose souls have become stiff through years of wickedness, and have grown double, so to say, by always looking earthward,—how can they make the efforts which are needed for such a task? Of all hopeless miracles the miracle of a death-bed repentance seems to me one of the most hopeless. Therefore repent in time; that is, repent now: for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.

X.

CONVINCE A MAN OF SIN;
THE BEST PREPARATION FOR PASSION WEEK.

ROMANS vii. 23.

I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.

WE are already half through Lent; and it is time we should turn our minds to those thoughts and to those subjects which will best prepare us for Passion week, more especially for Good Friday, the most solemn day, the most shameful day, and the saddest day in the christian year. But what is Passion week? It is the week of the Passion: that is to say, the week of suffering. For passion in old English means suffering, more particularly the suffering of Jesus Christ. Thus you read in the book of Acts, that Jesus shewed himself alive after his passion, that is, after his suffering on the cross. Thus too in the Litany we beseech our blessed Lord to deliver us by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, or by the cross and all that he suffered on it. Again in the Communion Service we are exhorted to give most humble and hearty thanks to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion, or

sufferings, of our Saviour Christ, both God and man. Passion week then is the season when we are more especially called upon to commemorate and call to mind and ponder and think over the sufferings of our Saviour Christ, during that dreadful week, when he was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, and by them was falsely accused, reviled, mocked, scourged, crowned with thorns, and at last crucified.

Now to the end that we may keep Passion week in a proper manner, by thinking and feeling about Christ's sufferings as we ought to do, the Church has appointed the forty days of Lent to be a sort of preparation for Passion week and Easter, just as it has appointed the four Sundays in Advent to be a preparation for Christmas. For there are two great seasons in the year which it behoves every Christian to keep, who wishes to pay dutiful honour to his Saviour, or who would awaken and stir up his heart to a thankful recollection of what Christ has done for mankind. The first season is Christmas, in honour of Christ's birth, to preserve the memory of his wonderful loving-kindness in coming down from heaven, and putting on the nature of man. The other season is Passion week and Easter, to commemorate his love in dying for us, and to celebrate the glory of his Resurrection. Both these seasons are so important, and it is of such moment to the welfare of your souls that you should keep them both in a godly manner, that the Church has set apart the Sundays in Advent, which come before Christmas, and the forty days of Lent, which come before Passion week, as a time of preparation for them.

The use of such a preparation is plain enough. In the first place it answers the same purpose that the early bell on Sunday is meant to answer. As that bell calls us to get ready for church, so do Advent and Lent call on us to get

ready for Christmas and for Easter. When a musical instrument has been laid by a while, it needs being put in tune; or it will make but sorry music. The minds and hearts of most Christians too require to be got into tune, before they can bear their part fitly and harmoniously in the services by which the Church commemorates the birth and death and resurrection of her Lord.

But there is another use in these times of preparation. They are, or ought to be, times of teaching and instruction. They are times when a minister is especially called upon to teach his flock all that it concerns them so much to know, first about the great purpose for which Christ came into the world, and secondly about his wonderful loving-kindness in dying for mankind.

The purpose for which our Saviour came into the world was, that he might give us light. He was a light, a heavenly light, to lighten the Gentiles: he came to give light to those who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death: and he is therefore called in Scripture the Sun of Righteousness. Now the best way of preparing you to rejoice heart and soul at the coming of that heavenly light,—the best way of leading you thankfully to hail the rising of the Sun of Righteousness,—is to give you a picture of the gross darkness which pressed like a heavy mildew on the hearts and consciences of men, before our Lord came down from heaven, and scattered the fog of sin and death, just as the sun scatters the night-fog at his rising. Thoroughly to enjoy the blessing of light, we must know what a woe darkness is, when it comes with all its terrors. Therefore one of the ways in which a minister is to prepare his people for Christmas, is, by telling them of the wretched ignorance and contented wickedness in which the Gentiles, and I might almost say, the Jews too, were lying sunk at the time when our Saviour was born.

But how is he to prepare them for Passion week? By speaking to them of sin. For it was sin that caused Christ's death. He is the Lamb of God who died for the sins of the whole world,—that by his precious blood-shedding he might reconcile and reunite us to the Father, and might obtain the Holy Ghost for us, to regenerate us, and, as it were, spiritually re-create us, so that we might become new men, and be turned from the power of Satan to God. This was the main reason why Christ died, that he might procure us the pardon of our past sins, and grace to help us for the future. Now is it not plain, that, in order to understand the value of this mercy, we must begin with being convinced of the hatefulness and danger of sin? Suppose I were to tell a heathen of Christ's mercy in dying for sinners, to purchase for them God's forgiveness and the help of the Holy Ghost. If the heathen were righteous in his own eyes, he would answer, "What is that to me? I want no pardon. I am no sinner. I never robbed or murdered any one. As for the help of the Holy Ghost, I have no need of that either. I am good enough without." Such would be the answer of a heathen who was righteous in his own eyes, were I to speak to him of the benefits of Christ's death. But begin with convincing him of sin; hold the glass of truth up to his soul, that he may see its loathsomeness and its weakness; make him feel that God is of purer eyes than to behold any iniquity,—not great iniquities, mind, the Bible does not say that,—not horrid and abominable crimes only, but all offences, all iniquities,—that the very heavens are not pure in his sight, and that he charges even his angels with folly; make the heathen understand that God requireth truth in the inward parts, in other words, that it is not enough to keep from outward acts of sin, but that we must govern our very thoughts and wishes: and, when you have thus set the law of God before him in all its

depth and breadth and purity, bid him look within; shew him the law in his members, the corrupt affections and propensities of his fallen nature, warring against and overpowering the law in his soul, the law of God written in his heart, and proclaimed by his reason and his conscience, so that the good, which he approves, he does not, and the evil, which he condemns, he does; and what will this heathen say then? Will he not start back in affright from this picture of his misery and weakness? will he not cry with an exceeding bitter cry, "Wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from the body of this death?" These are St. Paul's own words, my brethren: and now mark the words which come after them. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Hence we learn that our thankfulness for the death and sufferings of Jesus Christ springs out of, and is in proportion to, our sense of our own guilt and weakness. For if we are guilty, we need pardon; if we are weak, we need help: and both has Christ purchased for us. On the other hand, if we are not guilty, we want no pardon; if we are not weak, we want no help: why then should we feel grateful to Christ for bringing us gifts which we have no need of? In a word, the guilt of man, and the weakness of man, which spring like two crooked and blighted stems, with all their poisonous fruitage, from one and the same evil root, the corruption of his nature,—that guilt and that weakness are the first elementary truths which meet us at the very threshold of Christianity: and unless you feel these truths, and are as much convinced of them, as you are that fire burns, you can no more make advances in religion, than a man can read a chapter in the Bible without knowing his alphabet.

Accordingly when St. Paul, in the Epistle from which the text comes, is about to set forth the great doctrine of justification by faith, and salvation through the merits and blood

of Christ, he begins by a catalogue of the sins of the Gentiles and of the Jews, which he gives at such length that it fills the first two chapters. Not that he had any liking to think and talk about such foul and wicked practices: he says himself in another place, that it is a shame even to speak of such things: but he knew from his Master's teaching, that it is not the healthy that need a physician, but the sick, and that therefore, until he had convinced his patients, both Jews and Gentiles, that they were sick at heart, he could not hope that they would be brought to seek a cure from the great Physician of souls.

In like manner, Isaiah, the evangelical prophet, as he is called, for speaking so fully of Christ and his kingdom, ushers in his prophecy of the manifold blessings of that kingdom,—how? by telling us of God's great goodness? No: but by telling us of man's great wickedness. "Hear, O heavens! (he cries) and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation! a people laden with iniquity,"—observe the words, laden with iniquity, as if it were a sore burthen, too heavy to be borne —"a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupters!"—boys and girls that, as soon as they can run about, or at any rate by the time they are ten or twelve years old, corrupt one another, and teach and learn of each other not all the good they can, but all the evil. "They have forsaken the Lord: they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint."

Assuredly it is not by chance that the most evangelical of the prophets, and the most doctrinal of the apostles, both begin in the same way, by speaking of the sinfulness of man, of the weakness and sickness of our souls. They did

it, because they knew it was as necessary for them to begin thus, as for a builder, who would have his house stand, to lay a deep and strong foundation. The only support of christian holiness is christian faith and love: and the only true, the only possible foundation, humanly speaking, for christian faith and love, is a deep and strong conviction of all that Christ has borne and wrought for us,—a conviction of our need of his pardon, of our need of his help,—a conviction how utterly ruined and lost we are without that pardon and aid,—in a word, a conviction of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the utter helplessness of our nature. This is the only foundation of christian doctrine, the only root of the christian graces.

We must be convinced that our helplessness is such as can only arise from an evil bias in our nature,—that we are sinners, and cannot become otherwise through any power of our own,—that sin is born in the bone, as the saying is, and will not out of the flesh;—that there is indeed a law in our members, warring against the law of our reason and conscience, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members. Now this doctrine, which so humbles and casts down all the pride and vain boastings of man, seems to many people very hard; so that they will even say they do not believe it. They tell us it is impossible,—that we are God's favourite creatures,—that he has made us the lords of the creation, and heirs of eternal life,—and that therefore it is quite impossible that we should be so prone to sin, as the Bible, and our Church, setting forth the doctrine of the Bible in her Articles and Homilies, declare us to be. Now the plain answer to this fine reasoning is: it may seem to you impossible, but the fact is so notwithstanding. This is the answer, and a full answer, and in truth the only answer that can be made. If we were not men ourselves, and merely knew that such animals lived

in some other place,—in the moon for instance, or in that beautiful star which shines so brightly of an evening, there would be nothing unreasonable in trying to guess and fancy what such creatures might be. But seeing that we are ourselves men, and can look into ourselves, and can see and feel in some sort what our hearts are made of, the question is not what we are likely to be, but what we really are. Where the fact lies at a man's door, there is no room for guess-work.

The question whether we are not prone to sin from our cradles upward, is a mere question of fact. It is a fact too which everybody can speak to for himself: he has only to look within. Look within then, my brethren, into your own hearts: I advise, I exhort, I entreat you,—in God's name I command you, in the name of our blessed Saviour and Master I entreat you, to look within. Look into your hearts and tell me what you find there. Is it good? or is it evil? You will say, a little of both. Be it so: tell me then, or rather tell yourselves, honestly and truly, which of the two cost you the most trouble to learn? the good, or the evil? Which of the two came the easiest and the most naturally? Is there a doubt? Can any one doubt that it is easier to get bad habits than good ones? Can any one doubt that it is easier for a sober man to become a drunkard, than for a poor miserable besotted drunkard to trace his steps back and to become sober?

One reason of this is plain: because God's service is perfect freedom; and so we may leave it when we please. Whereas the devil's service is a miserable bondage. No master is more cruel; no servitude is more wearying; no chains are heavier or stronger, or harder to break. If you doubt this, ask the drunkard, whether he would not wish to become sober, whether he would not wish to leave off a habit which gives him sore eyes and shaking hands, a habit

which turns him into a brute beast, which clothes him in rags and poverty, which is hurrying him to the grave in this world, and will send him to a worse grave in the next: ask the poor wretch this; and he will tell you, he would give anything to become as sober as he was in his childhood. Ask him then, why he does not leave off drinking; since he knows the habit is so bad, and wishes so much to leave it off? His answer will be, "Because I can't." What is this but saying, "Sin has got so strong a hold on me, I cannot escape from her clutches?"

This then is one reason why bad habits are so much harder to break through than good ones. Another reason, and the chief one is, because our nature is corrupt, and apter to evil than to good, to wrong than to right, to do the devil's work than to do God's work.

Let us look at the question from another point of view. Ask mothers who have seen and watched children from their infancy, whether every child they ever saw had not something to learn that was good, and something to unlearn that was evil. Now where did this evil come from? It cannot have been taught to the child; for I am speaking of a time before all teaching. But if the evil was not taught to the child, the child must have had it naturally. So it is in other things. The good wheat must be sown and well looked after; or it will never come to much. The weeds sprout up and spread of themselves; and it is as great a labour to keep them down, as to get the good wheat up. The truth is, man is naturally prone to sin: his nature is corrupt: and without God's help he can no more mend it, than a sick man can mend and cure himself without the help of a physician.

But some may say, if this be so, if we are naturally so given to evil, it cannot be our fault if we do wrong. It is our misfortune: we cannot help it: and God will never

blame or punish us for not being better than he made us. You might as well blame a sick person for dying, as blame a man for sinning, if his nature is so corrupt and evil. No doubt, it would be very hard,—I have spoken a bold word; but St. Paul speaks as bold a one,—it would be very hard and unjust to punish men for what they cannot help. It would be very unjust to blame a sick man for dying, provided there were no physicians. But in a country where there are plenty of physicians, and the sick have only to send for them,—if in such a country a sick man is obstinate, and will not send for a physician, and will not take the means of being made well, he is to blame; and if he dies, he is guilty of his own death. Suppose now that the physician does not wait to be sent for, that he comes of his own accord to the sick man's bed-side, that he brings a medicine of rare herbs in his hand, and says to the sick man, "My friend, I heard you were very ill, and so I am come to see you. You certainly are very sick indeed, worse than you are aware of: for the fever gives you false spirits. Your disease is the leprosy; but it is a kind of leprosy, which, instead of breaking out openly, burns and dries up the inside. However, I have brought you a medicine, which will cure you, if you will take it. It is a medicine of rare herbs that come from the Indies; and I have paid a great price for it. I cannot bear to see a fellow-creature so near death, without helping him. Never mind your poverty; I want no payment. I will give you the medicine freely, with all my heart, if you will only take it." But the sick man refuses to take it. He does not like its look; or he tastes it, and finds it bitter, and will not swallow it; or he believes a neighbour, who tells him not to trust the physician, and that a glass of good wine is worth all the physic in the world. He will not take the physic; he drinks the wine instead; and the next morning he dies. Who is to blame?

My brethren, this is our case. We have this leprosy. We cannot cure ourselves. But Jesus Christ is come to us, the great physician of the soul. We could not go to him; but he is come to us. He has warned us of our danger. He gives us his medicine without money and without price. And well it is for us that he does so: for the medicine is so precious, that, if this church were a lump of gold, it would be as worthless as a grain of dust, compared with one drop of that healing medicine. He alone was rich enough to pay the price of the medicine: and that price was his own life. He died, that we might live,—that we might be healed of our deadly sickness,—that we might be washed and made clean from the leprosy of sin,—that our flesh might come again like the flesh of little children,—and that so we might be healed, and might live indeed, the only life worth living, a life of holiness and godliness, of honesty and soberness and purity. He has done all this for us. He has brought the medicine to our door: shall we refuse to take it? shall we say that we know better than he does, what will do us good? that we will have none of his medicine? We may say this if we please: for we are free to take the medicine or to leave it. But if we refuse to listen to him, and die in our sins, who will be to blame? No one except ourselves: and we shall be the losers and the sufferers.

This then is the right preparation for Passion week, to think seriously of our sins, which were the cause of Christ's sufferings, to sorrow over them, and to repent of them: and therefore Lent is appointed by the Church to be a season of humiliation and mortification and penance, that by passing through the strait gate we may be prepared to receive the pardon of the sins, of which we have repented, declared to us from the cross of Christ. My brethren, have you, each of you, such a sense of the sinfulness, the vileness of sin, as covers you with

shame, fills you with godly sorrow, and leads you to seek pardon and comfort where alone it can be found, at the foot of the cross? Then shall ye be meet to hear the prayer which Jesus from that cross offers up for you to his Father, that he will forgive you. Have you such a thorough conviction of your own weakness, are you so fully aware that there is a law in your members warring against the law of God, and tempting you to what you know to be wrong, as leads you to pray heartily to God, that he will send his Holy Spirit to dwell with you, and help you to all holiness of living? If you have, happy are you; for then you are in the road to heaven. But if you have not this sense of your sinfulness and your weakness, if you are without christian fear, and without christian thankfulness, if you neither think of Christ as a Saviour, nor pray for the Holy Ghost as a Comforter, then are you living in a christian country strangers to the very elements of Christianity: and it will be better in the day of judgment for Jews and heathens, who have never heard these truths, than for you who have heard them, but not heeded them.

XI.

THE ATONEMENT.

1 TIMOTHY i. 15.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

"CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners." He left all the glories of heaven: he came from the bosom of the Father, and was made man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and, after a life of toil and heavy care, he died a painful and shameful death upon the cross. Do you ask why he did this? why he gave up so much glory and blessedness? why he underwent so much pain? why he suffered the Jews to put him to such a cruel death? St. Paul tells you: he did it to save sinners. He did it to reunite us to the Father, and as it were to fasten and cement us to holiness and godliness with his most precious blood. Being God as well as man, I need not tell you, that he bore all those dreadful pains and insults and injuries, which you read of in the 26th and 27th chapters of St. Matthew, and in the latter chapters of the other Gospels,—I need not tell you that Jesus bore all these things of his own free will. It was with his own consent that the Jews nailed his innocent feet and hands to the cross. It was with his own consent that they spat on him, that they scourged him, that they dragged

him before Pilate, that they condemned him to die, that they made him bear the cross, that they wagged their heads at him and reviled him. If he had not permitted them to do all this they could not have done it. The power of his word, which had calmed the fury of the sea, and tamed such as were possessed by devils, would easily have quieted and put down the violence of those wicked men. A wish, a single wish would have been enough to free him: a single wish would have been enough to scatter all his enemies, in the midst of their blasphemies, of their mockery, of their malignant taunts. "Thinkest thou," he says, "that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" armies of heavenly soldiers, with their chariots of fire and horses of fire, any one of them powerful enough to destroy a world. But Jesus uttered no such prayer: and he tells us the reason why: "Because thus it must be, that the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Which is as much as to say, God's word must be kept: his will must be done: his prophets have promised redemption and pardon to the children of Adam through the blood of the Lamb of God. I am that Lamb. I am going therefore as a lamb to the slaughter: I must be gentle as a lamb; I must be unresisting as a lamb; that the great sacrifice, which is to be offered for the sins of the world, may be perfected, and that man may be freely pardoned, and united again to God.

This is the great secret and the foundation stone of Christianity; that man is reconciled to God by the blood of Christ. This is the great mystery,—let me rather call it the great marvel and miracle, of the atonement, which no love less than God's could have desired, which no wisdom less than God's could have devised, which no power less than God's could have accomplished. It is of this, God's wonderful and wonder-working scheme for the redemption

and salvation of his fallen creatures, that St. Paul is speaking in the text; and how does he speak of it? He tells us, that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation:" which means, that it is true, and a truth which concerns us very nearly. Many things are true, which do not concern us, and which we are neither the better for knowing, nor the worse for not knowing. It is true for instance, that a king of England was put to death by his subjects something more than a hundred and eighty years ago. It is true, that in some countries the people live chiefly on fruits and rice. It is true again, that there are two distant points on the earth, where the sun only rises once and sets once in a year; so that each day and each night lasts six months. But, though these facts are true, the knowledge of them does you no good. It does not make you happier: it does not in any way make you better. Therefore no one would think of calling these truths worthy of all acceptation. The truth, on the other hand, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, is of quite another kind. It is a truth we are to turn to practical use, a truth we are to live by, a truth we are to be saved by. Therefore St. Paul calls it worthy of all acceptation; not of a little acceptance, but of all. We are not to receive it with a slight welcome, and then think no more about it, as we might receive a neighbour, when he happens to call in for a few minutes. We are to receive it heartily and joyfully and entirely, with all acceptation, as a man would welcome his bride to his house, who is to be the inmate of it for life. This is the way that the great doctrine of redemption and salvation by the blood of Christ ought to be received by every one. It deserves, it is worthy of entire and universal acceptation. Let me entreat you to lend me your ears, while I try to give you some account of it, and to shew you how excellent, how comfortable, how hopeful a doctrine it is.

In the first place it is clear that, if Jesus Christ came to save sinners, there must be sinners to be saved. Unless we know and feel that the heart of man naturally loves sin, and that nevertheless, when we love sin, we love a thing which we ought to hate, and which is a disease and disgrace to us, the suffering and death of Christ will be as great a stumbling-block to us, as they were to the Jews, provided we never think about them. If our thoughts do not turn that way, of course we shall not stumble at that stumbling-block: just as a man who keeps away from the narrow gate spoken of in our Saviour's parable, will never see and feel that it is narrow. This is the reason why there are so many people in the world, who call themselves Christians, yet live the life of heathens. They never think about the matter; and Christian seems to them as good a name as any other: so they are content to be called by the name of Christ, and to wear his livery, as long as they have no service to do him. But God will not allow himself to be thus mocked. Remember the end of the man who hid his talent in a napkin. "Wicked and slothful servant" is the name his master calls him. God has given us the power of thinking: and for not using that power, or using it amiss, and employing it only on worldly things, he will surely call us to a strict account. Is the mind of man God's best and noblest gift? and is it the only thing on earth that is to lie fallow year after year? There are more parables, I believe, in the New Testament against taking no thought about heavenly things, and taking too much thought about earthly things, than against any other fault whatsoever.

But, if you do think, the whole mystery and miracles of the death and sufferings of our Saviour Christ will be a stumbling-block at the very outset, unless you know and feel the meaning of these four words, sin, and guilt, and justice, and punishment. "I came not to call the righteous, but

sinners," says Christ himself. It was useless to call those who fancied themselves righteous: they were satisfied already, and so would not come to him. "They that are whole," he says in another place, "have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." Does he mean that anybody is really whole? Not so: for we know that, in the language of Isaiah, "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (i. 5, 6). Our Saviour's meaning is this: just as a man who thinks his body is in good health, will not go to a physician, so the man who thinks his soul in good health, will not come to me. It is the sick man, the man who knows himself to be at death's door, that sends the most anxiously for a physician. It is the man who feels that he has the deadly disease of sin upon him, that runs the most readily to Jesus, the great physician of the soul.

Now this deadly disease we all have: and by nature it is utterly incurable. Do any of you doubt what I say? Do any of you doubt your being sinners? Look into your hearts. Do you find the love of God there? Do you find the love of your neighbour there? Alas! it is a great thing, if, instead of love, you do not find hatred. Do not be startled, and think it impossible there should be anything so wicked as hatred in that good, kind heart of yours. Look a little closer; probe a little deeper. What! no little grudge there against one neighbour for the affront he offered you a short time ago? No pleasure in speaking ill of somebody, who may have passed for a sort of pattern person in the next parish, if he or she, or their son or daughter, happen to have made a slip? No jealousy of another for being a little better off, or a little smarter, or a little more favoured in some way than you are? "But he does not deserve it." For this is the common answer to such a charge. And

what does that answer prove? It proves that you are looking at your neighbour's more prosperous condition with a sharp and unfriendly eye. If the same good fortune had befallen you or your child, would you have been so very scrupulous about rejoicing at it, because you, perhaps, do not deserve it either? Why then this difference in the two cases? Because you are not jealous of yourself; and you are jealous of your neighbour. In other words, because you have an ill-will to your neighbour in comparison with the good-will which you bear to yourself. Now what must that heart be, where all these little dirty selfish grovelling spiteful feelings find a place? Is it in a sound state?—in such a state as a heart ought to be? Yet I have not spoken of the greater sins, the grosser breaches of God's law. I have not said a word about that violence, that covetousness, that lust, that drunkenness, that revenge, which turn a common newspaper into a list and string of crimes.

Such is the state of man without religion; bad and vile at the best; and for the most part desperately wicked. What, then, was God to do? Laws he had tried: and the holier the laws, the more pleasure men seemed to take in breaking them. Besides, laws only tell us what is right: they arm us with no power of doing it. They are like so many looking-glasses, which show us our ugliness and deformity, but cannot give us new faces and shapes. Moreover, laws threaten punishment; and man had need to hear of pardon. Their language is—"Cursed is he that doeth not all the words of this law." "He that is guilty in one point is guilty of all." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is the terrible language of the law. Apply it, I beseech you, to your own case. Have you sinned? You are condemned to die. Have you broken any one of God's laws, in any one tittle, at any moment of your life? You know you have broken them in a thousand ways: many of you

live in utter disregard of them. Alas! you are then accursed; and the Bible tells us what the fate of the accursed is to be. "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Must this indeed be so? "Must I indeed go, merciful God! to dwell for ever with evil spirits in wailing and unutterable woe?" Such is the natural cry that would burst from every heart at hearing so fearful a sentence. Yet, if we look into the matter, I see not where, out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the sinner can turn for reasonable grounds of comfort. For we all know that God is just and true: and he has said he "will by no means clear the guilty." Now we are guilty: how then is he to clear us? Is the Almighty Ruler of heaven and earth not to rebuke and punish wickedness? Is he to allow the whole assembled universe of angels and men, and every order of created spirits, to witness a sight so monstrous, so offensive to all reason, as an open rebellion against his authority, continual breaches of his law, a forgetfulness of his will for years and years, and yet to withhold his hand, and not to punish? "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord?" But why say for years and years? Were the sun one morning to refuse to rise, were he to quit his place in the sky at mid-day, or to change his course and turn eastward, what dismay, what confusion, what destruction would it cause, even were he to do so once only! And has not your soul, which is better than a thousand suns, which shall outlive that glorious sun for thousands of years, which was made originally in the image of God himself,—has not your soul abandoned its place on earth, forgotten its duty, and gone back from the way of God's commandments? I verily believe, or I should not dare to say so in this holy place,—I should not dare to lie to my own heart before God, even for the sake of winning you to Christ,—I verily believe, that were one of those pure and mighty spirits, who keep watch round the throne of God, to stand at this moment before

our eyes, he would tell us that a deliberate and wilful sin is a sadder and more dreadful thing, an evil more difficult to amend and repair, than if the sun were to go out in mid heaven, and darkness to usurp the place of light. He would tell you, that he and his brethren could soon repair or replace the sun; but that for the wickedness, the stubbornness, the presumptuous rebellion of sin, he knew no remedy: he only knew that, unless God found a remedy, it must end in death and hell; and that he had sorrowed over it with a great but unavailing sorrow.

Is it then come to this? Must millions of millions of human beings, who have dwelt on this earth since the time of Adam, be all cast into endless torments? Is there to be sorrow in heaven over God's fallen creatures, and a jubilee among the devils for having ruined God's best work? Not so, my brethren. God himself has found the remedy: none but God could. He has sent his Son, to take our nature upon him, and to die on the cross, a ransom and a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Join with me in adoring the wisdom and the love of this great plan: its wisdom: for it has enabled God to pardon us, and yet to show how deeply he hates sin. Can any one pretend that God is indifferent about sin; can any one dare to fancy that sin is a light and trivial thing; when God, before he pardoned it, sent his only Son into the world to die for it? If he had pardoned sin without a sacrifice, we should have been led to doubt whether sin was really displeasing to God. But God has required a sacrifice: and that sacrifice is the life and death of Christ. He has given his well-beloved Son to suffer in the stead of a rebellious world: and, through this shewing forth of the most awful justice, he publishes the fullest and freest pardon. There is a story told of an ancient lawgiver, that, among the laws by which he endeavoured to uphold purity of life among his people, one was, that whoever com-

mitted adultery should lose both his eyes: having sinned through the lust of the eye, the eyes which ensnared him into sin were to be forfeited. Now it fell out that his own son was found guilty of adultery soon after. The father condemned him to lose both his eyes. So beloved however was he by the people, that all the city besought him to spare his son. At length he yielded. But how? He commanded the executioner to pluck out one of his own eyes, and then one of his son's. Thus the law was satisfied; yet the guilty son was spared the loss of his sight: and the lawgiver, in the very act of setting aside the law, established it more firmly than ever. The story of a human lawgiver may help you to understand the manner in which God teaches us,—and teaches too at the very moment when he is pardoning us,—that he cannot loosen or break the chain, which fastens sin and woe together. That chain remains unbroken: yet the criminal is pardoned: the outcast is invited back; the prodigal son is welcomed home to his Father's house, and received again into full favour.

But the cross of Christ not only shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and proves the justice and the holiness of God, who would not pardon it without the sacrifice of the blood of his dear Son: it also proves the unspeakable love of our merciful Father for his sinful and rebellious children. "Herein is love," says St. John; "not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John iv. 10.) This is the proof of God's love: a stronger cannot be imagined. Would he have sent his only Son to die for us, if he had not loved us? If any of you are fathers, if any here are mothers, ask yourselves, would you give the life of one of your children for anything you did not love? But God gave the life of his only Son for the salvation and redemption of mankind. What a wonderful, what an awful, what a comfortable proof does

this give of God's love! Surely it is a love that passeth knowledge. "God so loved the world," says our Lord himself, "that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii. 16.)

This then, my brethren, is the blessed truth, which St. Paul calls worthy of all acceptation. While man was making a mock at sin, God came down from his throne of glory, and suffered death as a creature, the representative of sinners; and having done this, he declares to the world that sin can be forgiven. Here "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psalm lxxxv. 10.) We are justified freely; but we are justified through the blood of Jesus Christ. If a man can hear this, without loving God, and striving to obey him, without loving Christ, and following him, without hating sin, which caused Christ's death, without loving his neighbour, for whom Christ died,—no more can be done for such a man. God has no second Son to send, no second ransom to offer. So teaches the apostle to the Hebrews: "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" (x. 26, 27). To such a man, to the stubborn reckless sinner, the death of Christ is a fearful thing: for he is in fact as guilty of Christ's death, as if he had himself driven the nails into his hands and feet. He is crucifying the Son of God afresh: he is putting him by his evil deeds to open shame. To such a man, I say, the death of Christ ought to be a fearful thing. But to the penitent, humble, pious, and thankful Christian, it is the happiest, the most comfortable, the most blessed event that ever took place. It wipes out his transgressions: it confirms his pardon: it secures his acceptance with God. "What shall we say to these things?" The words are St. Paul's: and I know not how I can con-

clude better than by repeating them. "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. viii. 31-39.) But remember, my brethren, that, as St. John tells us, "he who hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure."

XII.

THE GOSPEL NEWS;

OR,

CHRIST'S VICTORY.

ISAIAH lii. 7.

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!

THE message which our Saviour brought down to us from heaven, is called in the New Testament the Gospel, or the good news, of Jesus Christ: and the words spoken by the angel to the shepherds were much to the same purpose: "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." Now what are these good tidings? what is this good news, which our Lord took so long and so toilsome a journey to bring us? this good news, the light of which brightened his feet as he trod over the tops of the mountains, when he came to declare it to those who were sitting in the valley of the shadow of death? Those among you who are old enough to remember the late war, will be best able to answer this question. For they will know what good news in time of war means. In those days, if one heard the words *good news*, one immediately asked: "What! have we gained a great victory by sea? or a great victory by land?

Have our sailors taken the enemy's fleet? or our soldiers beaten the enemy's army? And is the victory so complete a one as to give any hopes of peace?" These are the questions which everybody was wont to ask some years ago, when mention was made of good news. Now if in answer to these questions we had been told, "The good news just received is not solely about a victory by land, nor solely about a victory by sea, nor solely about peace, but about all three together: for we have beaten all our enemies in every possible way: we have beaten them both by sea and by land, and so thoroughly, that we are sure of making a safe and glorious peace to-morrow, provided we do not throw away the opportunity,"—if, I say, we had heard an answer of this sort to our questions about the good news, how happy, how proud, how well satisfied should we have been! We should have said, "This surely is the very best news that was ever brought to England."

Now the good news which our Lord brought us from heaven, is just news of this kind. He came on purpose to help us in our warfare: because he saw we were getting the worst. I need not remind you in what warfare the children of Adam were engaged at his coming: for the same warfare is going on now. Nor is there any necessity that I should tell you who our enemies were: for they were the same against whom we are still enlisted, against whom we have still to wage battle. Sin and death were in those days, as they are still, the great enemies of mankind; and there seemed to be no possible end of the war, short of our utter discomfiture and destruction. Sin and Death were fighting side by side against us: the devil, like a mighty warrior, who had never found his match, was raging fiercely: and all whom he caught and seized, the grave, opening its wide mouth, swallowed up: so that there seemed to be no hope left for man. It was in this sad state of the war, when

things were thus going against us, that Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, came down to our help and rescue. Have you ever thought of David delivering the lamb out of the lion's mouth, and smiting the lion and the bear, that had come to attack his father's flock? You will then have a lively image of our helplessness in the clutches of Sin and Death, until Jesus vouchsafed to come and deliver us from those iron clutches. For we are God's flock; and out of that flock, Satan, that roaring lion, was not merely taking a single lamb: he was carrying off the whole flock one by one, to tear and mangle and devour, when the glorious Son of David, seeing and pitying our wretchedness, came to our aid, and fought and conquered for us, and delivered us from the jaws of our destroyer, and therewith from the power and fear of death. This is the good news,—news of a victory over Sin, news of a victory over Death,—news lastly of a reconciliation with our God and Father, against whom we had been lured by our enemy Sin to be guilty of treachery and rebellion. And is not this the best of all news? Is it not a good thing to know that we can now resist Sin through the grace of Christ, who makes us more than conquerors? Is it not a good thing to know that we have no more to fear Death, now that Christ has brought life and immortality to light, and set it clearly before our eyes? Above all, is it not a blessed thing to be assured that God will receive us into favour, notwithstanding our manifold offences, if we will turn to him, and trust in his promises, and believe that he can and will forgive us, and act as becomes the penitent who have been pardoned?

Is not this, I say, the very best of news? Now this is the very news that Jesus brought us. He has not put an end to the war as yet; but he has set it quite on a new footing. Sin is still abiding in the world, notwithstanding the victories of Jesus, just as a remnant of the Canaanites was left on the

borders of the promised land, notwithstanding the victories of Joshua. Those Canaanites, the Bible tells us, were left to try the children of Israel, and to teach them war (Judges iii. 1, 2): and it is perhaps for a like reason that Sin is still left on earth, in order that we may be put to the test, to prove whether we choose to obey God or no, and that we may be trained to our duties as Christ's soldiers by a course of hard service against God's enemies. These seem to be among the reasons why Sin is still permitted to carry on war against us, and why Death, which is inseparable from Sin, still goes on prowling about the world. But though the war is still raging between the children of Adam on the one side, and Sin and Death on the other side, how different are the prospects of that war since Jesus came to our aid! Before his birth the struggle seemed hopeless. Here and there perhaps one or two might be enabled to make a fight; like good old Simeon, and Anna the prophetess, and righteous Zachariah, and Nathanael, and the good centurion: and doubtless there were a few more, whose names are known to God only. But for the great bulk of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, the battle against Sin was in those days quite hopeless. Sin was every day waxing stronger, and spreading wider; goodness, on the other hand, was growing weaker and rarer. Man felt himself to be overmatched by Sin: he was utterly unable to make head; indeed he could scarcely lift up his hand against it.

Such was the state of the war at Christ's coming. Satan was carrying all before him: and man had no chance of victory. But all this is now changed, and most blessedly for the better. We are no longer the weaker side. While the power of Sin and Satan has been much lessened by Christ's coming, our weakness has been much strengthened by helps of various kinds: so that he who fights under Christ's standard, may fight with good courage, knowing

what those helps are;—knowing that his heavenly Captain has provided armour of proof for him, a helmet of salvation, a breastplate of righteousness, a shield of faith, armour strong enough, if we only put it on, to save us from all the darts and bullets of the enemy. Nor is the giving us this armour all that Christ has done, to aid us in our hard warfare. He has sent his Spirit to strengthen us while we are standing. He has given us his cross to catch hold of when we are falling. He has proclaimed that we are at peace with God, that we may fight with a better heart. He has promised and assured us of a glorious triumph for every one who will fight his best. Moreover he has declared that, though Death is allowed for the present to mow down the bodies of his faithful soldiers, its power over them shall cease after a time, and that then he will raise them up to life again. Rejoice, therefore, ye that mourn; be comforted, ye that are in affliction: let your tears be turned into smiles, your sobs into thanksgivings; for the Lord has brought you good tidings of consolation concerning all who have died in his faith and fear.

Such is the news which Jesus has brought us. Such is the blessed change in the prospects of our warfare, which our Lord has wrought for his faithful soldiers. Whereas men before could not cope with sin, we may now be sure of overcoming it. Whereas men before shuddered at the thought of death, as the dark and dismal end of all things, we have now been taught to look upon it as the gate of a more glorious life. Whereas men before felt that they were at enmity with God, and therefore could not love him or take pleasure in him, they now know that he is ready to receive them into favour, and will treat them as sons, if they will only behave to him as such.

But some of the more unlearned among you may perhaps ask, "How can we be sure that these things are so?"

Because they are all written in the New Testament; in which the good news of Jesus Christ is published and declared to the sons of men, and is handed down from generation to generation, without the possibility that anything should be added to it, or anything taken away from it, or anything altered in it. There it stands unchanged and unchangeable in every essential point, the very same good news which St. Peter and St. John and St. Paul preached to the people of their time, and then wrote down for our instruction. That the New Testament does indeed set forth all I have been telling you about the good news of Jesus Christ, and the great advantages of his coming, three texts from St. Paul will suffice to prove. The first of them describes the wretched plight in which even the better part of mankind were before the coming of Christ, because they felt themselves unable to contend with sin: the second speaks of the victory which Christ has given us: the third of the happy peace which he has made between sinners and the God of heaven.

The first text is this: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24.) That is to say, who shall deliver man from the yoke of sin, which hangs like a dead weight about him, clogging and hindering him in his efforts after holiness? Can any words be stronger? Could a man more feelingly express the loathsomeness of the sin which held him in its bondage, than by calling it a body of death, and likening it to a dead body which he could not help carrying about with him? And who has delivered man from this dead body? The answer is given in the next verse: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." God has delivered us from this crushing load of sin; and he has done it through Jesus Christ.

But this glorious truth of our deliverance is still more

strongly, or at least more clearly, stated in the second text: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." (1 Cor. xv. 56.) Here death is represented as a serpent with a sting, which draws all its venom, all its terrors, and all its danger from sin: whereby we are to understand that, were there no such thing as sin in this world, we should have no reason to fear death. Why should men, why do they,—men I mean who have never heard of the Gospel,—shrink from lying in their coffins, more than from lying in their beds? Simply because they know not what may happen to them after death: and the consciousness of having offended God, the fear of what may befall them from his wrath, must needs haunt and trouble a man, and keep him from dying calmly. These are the worst, the most painful, the most incurable terrors, which the thought of death can awaken; and they draw all their poison from sin. It is sin too that gives death all its dangers: for sin alone can kill the soul. After having thus represented death as a serpent, the apostle goes on to speak of sin as an enemy; which is the same figure as I have been making use of above: "the strength of sin is the law." Here Sin is described as a strong enemy coming against us. And how is he armed? in what does his great strength lie? In the law: not in the law of Moses merely, but in the law written in the hearts of all who have the gift of reason and conscience. This law Sin, before the coming of Christ, brandished in every man's face, crying with a sneer of scorn, "Do this or die. Look, wretched man, look here at this law which I am holding up to your eyes! Behold here what God requires of you. These are his laws, his commandments! Have you kept them? Have you done them? all? always? You have not, I know you have not. I read your guilt in your face. Your conscience is bearing witness against you, that you have not kept these righteous

laws. Here is my indictment against you: here is a warrant from God, whose laws you have broken: here is a sentence pronounced on you by the just Judge. He condemns you for your disobedience: he banishes you from his presence: he gives you over to me, to be my slave and victim: for I am Sin." Such is the boasting language which we may suppose Sin or Satan to have uttered in the heart of a thinking man before the coming of Christ. When thus armed with the law of God, Sin is too much for us. So that man is represented by St. Paul as in a twofold danger; from the venomous serpent, Death, and from the strong enemy, Sin. Now mark what comes next; for it justifies all I have told you about the good news of Jesus Christ: "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Here St. Paul plainly tells us that, notwithstanding the strength of sin, notwithstanding the poison of death, God has given us the victory over sin and death, through Jesus Christ.

The third text I promised to lay before you, was to shew that Christ has made peace between sinners and the King of heaven. A very few words from the Epistle to the Romans (v. 1) will prove that. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Thus have I set before you three texts,—the first describing the wretchedness of our state before the coming of Christ,—the second shewing how poisonous death, and how strong and irresistible sin would be, unless Christ had given us the victory over them, and assuring us that Christ has indeed given us that victory,—the third declaring in plain terms that we are now at peace with God. This then is the blessing of the Gospel: this is the good news which Christ has brought us. If peace with the King of kings,—if the being reconciled to our heavenly Father,—if a glorious

victory over Sin and Death,—if our deliverance from a heavy and loathsome yoke, which none but Christ could have taken off our necks,—if all this deserves the name of good news,—then is the Gospel the very best news ever uttered in the ears of mortal man. Shall we not rejoice at this good, this glorious, this blessed news? No, my brethren; not just now. This is no day for rejoicing. The battle of Trafalgar was the greatest naval victory the English ever won. It wholly crushed the power of the enemy by sea. It destroyed the great fleet which he had fitted out and manned to invade and conquer England. Yet when the news of this great victory came, there were few eyes that did not shed a tear, few hearts that did not heave a sigh. The joy of the nation was dashed with sorrow. For the admiral, to whose courage and skill we owed that victory, fell himself at the moment of gaining it. He bought it for us with his life: and even in the midst of our triumph we could not but grieve for the loss of so brave a commander. My brethren, the joy of a Christian, at the very best, must be dashed with awe and sorrow. Even when we rejoice in the Lord, we must rejoice with trembling. But this is no day for rejoicing at all. It is a day for sorrow, a day for humiliation and shame. You have heard in the second lesson and the Gospel for the day, how great, how inestimable a price was paid for the victory which Christ won for us. You have heard how the Captain of our salvation not only fought and conquered, but died for us. Nay, it was by dying that he conquered for us. His death was not a chance of war, like that of other captains: he laid his life down by his own will and deed: of his own accord he underwent all those horrid pains and insults: he came from heaven on purpose to undergo them: because it had pleased his Father to decree that without bloodshedding there should be no remission of sins, that except through the

blood of the holy Jesus, there should be no salvation for mankind. It is this that makes the story so touching, so full of woe. We see the Lamb of God, with all the helplessness of a lamb, coming meekly and resignedly to the sufferings, which his human nature shrank from. We see him leaning over the deep gulf, which was yawning darkly before his feet,—looking down into it with a trembling eye, which pierced to its lowest depths, and counted up all its miseries and horrors,—and then saying, "This pit is very terrible; but, if it be thy will, O my Father, that I should suffer this, I am content. If there be no way to save mankind from falling into this gulf, except by falling into it myself, let them lead me and cast me in." Surely when we are commemorating this painful, this merciful sacrifice and self-devotion of the Son of God for our sakes, the good news of the Gospel, full of comfort as it is, should awaken us to sorrow and shame.

Yes, my brethren, we should be smitten with shame, as well as with sorrow, by the thought of Christ's sufferings. Indeed the sorrow would be unprofitable, without the shame. For why did Christ undergo all this extreme anguish and agony? what was the cause of his sufferings? Your sins and mine. He died for our sins. How then, with this dismal truth staring us in the face, how can we carry our heads aloft, as if we had no reason for self-abasement? What would you have done if you had been Jews, and if, after having stood among the mob around Pilate's judgment-seat,—after crying out, "Not this man, but Barabbas!"—you had been converted by the preaching of the apostles? Such Jews there must no doubt have been: some assuredly must have been converted by the apostles after our Lord's ascension, who but a while before had joined in crying, "Crucify him! crucify him! Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now I ask, had you been among those Jews, how would

you have felt when Good Friday came round again? Would it have been a pleasant thought to you, that on that day year, or two years, you had been boisterously lifting up your voice against your Saviour, the innocent and holy Jesus? Would you have felt quite satisfied with yourselves, when the return of that day brought the remembrance of Christ's sufferings home to you? Would you not rather have humbled yourselves to the earth at the recollection of your crime? If you would, humble yourselves now. If you have ever been guilty of any wilful sin, humble yourselves now. For whoever commits any action which Jesus has forbidden, whoever cherishes any feeling or temper which Jesus disapproves, whoever prefers a gainful injustice, an angry passion, an evil lust, to the service of his Lord and Master, every such person by his deeds, if not by his words, declares as plainly as the Jews did, "I will not have this man to reign over me: not this man, but Barabbas! I will have none of the purity and self-denial of Jesus: I like drunkenness and rioting and debauchery far better. I will have none of his humility: give me pride. I will have none of his gentleness: give me anger. I will have none of his tender-heartedness: give me an easy careless indifference to the sufferings and griefs of others." How many in every place think thus, though they may not say it! Yet there can be no doubt that every sinful action is an open rejecting of our Lord and Master, and a preferring of some vile Barabbas to him.

Methinks, however, some one among you is whispering to himself,—"This may be all very true of my neighbours; but happily it is not true of me. God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are. I have never swerved from the path of duty. I have kept all the commandments from my youth upward. Therefore I have no need to humble myself." Yes,—I would say to the man, who has this flat-

tering, this mistaken, this false opinion of himself,—yes, even you have great need of humbling yourself, for not loving God and his Son more. Your words prove that you do not love God: if you did love him, you could never look on yourself as righteous before him. The self-righteous and self-satisfied have no idea of spiritual love: yet, if they are without that, they are nothing. To love our God, our Lord tells us, is the first and great commandment: how then can any one pretend that he has kept all the commandments, when the love of God has no place in his heart? Nor is it enough to love the Father, unless we love the Son also, for having done and suffered such great and terrible things on our behalf. The man who can read the story of the Crucifixion, and know that it was for his sake, for his redemption, that Christ gave up the happiness of heaven, and vouchsafed to become man, and to undergo a lingering and shameful death,—the man, I say, who can know all this, without returning love for love, and feeling most deeply thankful for such wonderful, such unmerited goodness,—such a man may be decent in his behaviour; he may lead a respectable life; he may be esteemed a man of honesty and honour; but assuredly he has not the heart of a man, much less the spirit of a Christian. Humble yourselves therefore, ye self-righteous, and grieve over your want of love: humble yourselves, and cast yourselves on the ground before your crucified Lord.

XIII.

RISE WITH CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS iii. 1.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.

"CHRIST is risen!" Such is the greeting in Russia on the morning of Easter Day. In the great city of Moscow, and throughout the whole country, when two friends met on this morning, one of them says to the other, "Christ is risen!" Among all the customs I ever read of, this to my mind is one of the most christian and most beautiful. It is seeing the resurrection of Jesus Christ in its true light, not as a fact which we are merely to believe, because it is written in the New Testament, without thinking or caring much about it, but as a piece of good news to ourselves, which we cannot help speaking of for joy. What the Russians then have said to each other on Easter Day for hundreds of years, let me say to you: let me now say to you with a joyful and thankful heart, "Christ is risen."

The battle is over. The great contest between God, the incarnate Son, fighting for us, and Sin and Death fighting against us, is decided. Sin, having first been baffled by the life of blameless holiness, and unwearied active goodness, which the man Jesus so long led, was conquered upon Good

Friday on the cross. Death, the last and only remaining enemy, was conquered this morning by the Resurrection. The victory is complete. Their yoke is broken: their sting is taken away: we have nothing more to fear from either. For Christ has risen, and by his rising has assured us that we shall rise also.

This is one of the reasons why the resurrection of Christ is so joyous, so heart-stirring an event: because it assures us that, if we follow the steps of his holy life, we too shall rise from the grave as he did. But there is also another resurrection of Christ's followers, of which the apostles are wont to speak, and of which they are wont to consider their Lord's resurrection as a type. And this resurrection is to take place even while we continue in this life, before we are laid in the grave. All who believe in Christ, says St. Paul again and again, have risen with him,—not, *will rise* with him, but *have risen* with him already. *If ye be risen with Christ*, are the words of the text,—not, if you are to rise with him hereafter, but if you are actually risen with him at this time,—seek the things which are above. Now what resurrection can this be? In what sense can a Christian, so long as he is carrying about this frail and perishable body, be said to be risen? In the chapter before the text, the apostle tells the Colossians, that they are "buried with Christ in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins, hath he quickened together with him." Thus again, when writing to the Romans, he tells them, that "so many as are baptized into Jesus Christ are buried with him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." For this reason baptism is called the washing of regeneration, that is to say, of a new or second birth. This too is what the

Catechism teaches us, namely, that the inward and spiritual grace of baptism, or the spiritual benefit to which we are admitted by it, is a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness.

Hence we learn that all who have been baptized, all who have been received into Christ's family, ought to look upon themselves as having died with Christ, which death in them should be a death unto sin. Moreover, they should consider themselves as having risen with Christ, by a new birth unto righteousness. And having so risen, they should shew that they have indeed risen with Christ, by leading a new life, and seeking the things which are above. As Christ did not break loose from the grave to tarry on earth, but, having risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, so, instead of lingering among the things of earth, we too, as the Collect for Ascension-day expresses it, should ascend into heaven in heart and mind, and dwell there with him continually.

In the first place every member of Christ's Church should look upon himself as having died with Christ, which death in him must be a death unto sin. "They that are Christ's (says St. Paul) have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts" (Gal. v. 24): that is to say, they have done their utmost to root out and destroy the evil passions and inclinations natural to sinful man. St. Peter in the same spirit, and nearly in the same words, writes thus: "Christ bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1. ii. 24). But why is the forsaking sin,—which of course is the thing signified,—called a death unto sin? It seems to be so called for two reasons: to express the completeness of the reformation and amendment which the Gospel requires from the sinner; and to express its difficulty and its painfulness.

For, if we are to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, it is clear that sin is not a thing to be played or trifled

with, or to be treated tenderly. We are not to make any covenant or truce with it, nor to shew it any mercy. Death, death is the word. We are to treat sin, as Saul was commanded to treat those sinners, the Amalekites: we are to give it no quarter: we are to fight against it until it is utterly destroyed. Death, which is the portion of the rebel,——death, which is the portion of the murderer,—death, which is the certain doom of vipers, and hornets, and other evil and venomous creatures, whenever we can get at them to kill them,—death, and nothing less, is the sentence which God has passed upon sin. And what can be juster or more fitting, even by our own rules? For is not sin the great, the universal murderer, that first brought death into the world? Is not it poisonous and deadly to the bodies and souls of men? No wonder then that sentence of death has been pronounced against it! a sentence from which there is no reprieve. We must execute it on and in ourselves, if we would not have it executed upon us. As Saul lost the kingdom of Israel by sparing Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen, so shall we lose the kingdom of heaven, if we spare a single one of those sins, which we are commanded utterly to destroy.

If the Gospel then had said no more than this, kill and destroy sin, pluck it up by the roots and cast it from you,—it would have laid down a rule wholly irreconcilable with all that parleying and truce-making, with all that harbouring and pampering of sin, which unhappily is so common. But Scripture not only bids us destroy sin: it says, Die unto sin. Mark the strength of the expression: *Die* unto sin. The dead know not, nor care for anything in this world. Their love and hatred and envy are clean wiped out. A dead man is as cold and motionless as a stone, to all that the living make the greatest stir about. How perfectly then, how entirely, ought we to be free from sin, in order to

be *dead* to it! It is not enough to keep from outward acts of sin, if the heart cherishes any secret liking for it. This is not dying to it. Before we can attain to that perfect sinlessness, our hearts must be as completely closed against the tempter, as if we were nailed down in our coffins; our ears must be deaf to his voice; our eyes must be blind to his charms. We must not only give up every evil practice; we must also stifle every evil desire. Nothing less can deserve the name of being dead to sin. This then is the perfection of innocency which we are to strive after. I do not say, that we shall ever reach it; but by the help of God's Holy Spirit we may advance toward it: we may, and we ought all, to be ever getting nearer and nearer to it.

Nor does this scriptural expression of dying to sin, merely bespeak the completeness of the deliverance which the Christian ought to enjoy from the yoke and chains of Satan: it also denotes the painfulness and difficulty of our first steps in that deliverance. For we have steps to take toward that end; and sometimes very painful ones. Christ has not done so much for us, as to leave us nothing to do for ourselves. He is the door; but we must enter in at the door: he is the way; but we must walk along the way. He is our most merciful and only Saviour: but in such wise, that we have still a salvation to work out, and that too with fear and trembling. Now the beginning of this work of ours is often so painful, the struggle a man has to go through in parting with his sins is at times so hard, the wrench needed to tear him from his evil habits is not seldom so sharp, that the Gospel compares it to dying. After death, as you know, the body has no sense or feeling. But before we can arrive at the quiet state of death, we must first die: and though death is calm and painless, dying is often difficult and painful. Many an ache must be undergone, many a struggle made, before the soul can work her way through

the walls of the fleshly prison, in which she has grown and been shut up. Thus it is when a separation takes place between the soul and body; and thus too it is when a separation takes place between the soul and sin. Though the soul, when it has once broken away, and got loose from what held it captive, even from the chains of Satan, when it has escaped from the snare of the fowler, being free, is happy and at ease, still the exertion needed to make the escape, the effort to break the chain is often very trying: so that, though the being free from sin is a calm and peaceful state, which the Scripture compares to death, the getting free from it is oftentimes attended with such hard and grievous strugglings, that the Gospel likens it to dying.

Thus, you see, Christianity begins where everything else ends. It begins with death. Death, which is the goal of all earthly things, is the starting-point in the christian race. We are to set out on our course toward God by dying unto sin. This however is only the beginning. It is good to get rid of sin. It is good at any price to escape from the company of those miserable persons, who, as St. Peter expresses it, are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. But, though this is good, as far as it goes, it does not go far enough. It is not enough to die unto sin, unless we live afterward unto righteousness.

For consider what death is. It is a state in which a man can do nothing. If he has no longer the power of doing wrong, he is equally without the power of doing right. The dead cannot serve God: for in death no man remembereth him; nor can any give him thanks in the pit. Nor can a dead man do anything for his fellow-creatures: for there is no work, or device, or knowledge, or wisdom in the grave. What then is he good for? For nothing, but to be buried and put out of the way. Nor is death merely a useless state to be in: it is also a joyless state. If a man can do no

good to others in the grave, neither can he receive any good in it himself. A corpse has no more feeling than a log of wood, and is just as incapable of enjoying pleasure, or any sort of happiness or satisfaction. Now can such a useless, such a joyless, such an insensible and loglike state, be a state that the Lord of life and happiness can take delight in? When God created the world, did he make it in a state of death? Nay, the world was dead before; for an uncreated or unborn thing is all one as if it were dead. But God at the creation called it out of death, and gave, not to man only, but to all the kinds of animals, to the four-footed beasts, and to the birds and fishes and insects,—to each of these at the creation God gave such a life as to his wisdom and goodness seemed fitting for them. It is life, and not death, that God delights in. It was to break the bonds of the grave, to rescue man from death, that Christ came down from heaven. Are Christ's people then to be exceptions to the great rule? Can we suppose that in their case, and in theirs only, God, who in all other things and creatures takes pleasure in life, and gives it, will be satisfied with a state of death? Did Christ come to redeem a dead people to himself? Far from it, my brethren: he came to bring us life, not in the next world only, but in this world also.

Therefore, after dying to sin, we are not to continue dead; but we are to be born again, as the Scripture calls it, and to begin living in good earnest. We are to live a christian life. You know what life is, better than I can tell you. You know it to be the opposite to death. Is death an inactive, a torpid, a useless state? a state in which a man can do no good? Life should be an active, energetic, useful state: and its business should be to do good. Such is life, and the business of it. What then is a christian life? It is a life in which all these things are done in a christian spirit.

It is a life of which the activity, the energy, the usefulness, and the business are christian.

But I will set this before you in another light. Let us look at it with reference to Christ himself. He, being God on earth, led a divine life during his stay here. Now what proof did he give us of this life? You will tell me perhaps, that he healed the sick, that he raised the dead, that he calmed the raging of the sea, and did many other mighty works, such as no mere man can do. These however, though proofs of his possessing more than human power, are not the chief signs of his divinity. The greatest proof of that was his perfect union of heart and mind and purpose with the Father. It was his "meat," as he tells us, "to do the will of him that sent him," and to finish his work. This, my brethren, is the best proof which Christ gave, or indeed could give, that the life he led was divine. Would you lead a christian life? Lead such a life as Christ led. No life unlike his can be a christian life; and every life, in proportion as it comes near to his, will in that same degree be christian. Our Saviour did not undergo all those grievous pains for us, merely that we should cease to commit sin. It is not for that negative, that slumbering, for that sluggish and inglorious virtue, that he has prepared the glories of his kingdom. He did not come to reign over the dead: nor was it any part of his purpose to people heaven with drones and sleepers. As his life on earth was active, as he spent his days in working the work of him that sent him, so must all Christians do Christ's work: and they must strive to do it as cheerfully, as faithfully, and as constantly as Christ did the work of his Father.

Here in a few words you have an account of the outward signs of the christian life. The Christian is just as busy as other men; nay, often far busier. He is quite as painstaking, quite as careful to fit his means to his end; in

a word, he is quite as much alive as any grovelling child of earth can be. The difference between them is, that the child of earth seeks his own glory, his own pleasure, his own advantage; while the Christian, who has been born again a child of heaven, toils and labours and tasks his mind for the glory of God, and for the good of his fellow-creatures. In the man of the world, self in some shape or other is uppermost: whereas in the Christian, in proportion as he is a Christian, that same hateful and greedy self is undermost.

This is one great difference between them. A second difference is pointed out in our text. The true Christian, being risen with Christ, seeks the things which are above: while the man who is no Christian at heart, whatever he may be in name,—and many, alas! are called Christians; may none of us be among the number! who have no more love for Christ, or thought about him, than the untaught heathens,—such men, I say, have all their thoughts and affections set on things below. Their plans, their views, their wishes and desires, never rise an inch above the earth. To hear them speak, or see them act, one would suppose they had made a league with death, and had found some secret, known only to themselves, for sealing and stopping up the grave. One would imagine that they fancied themselves certain of living on for ever here; or at least that they were quite sure, if by any accident they should happen to die, of being never called to live again hereafter. Yet these are the worldly-wise: at least so the world esteems them. Wisdom forsooth! What would these wise men say of a person who knew that he was to start ere long on a journey to some distant country,—that he was to go, for instance, to the burning wilderness, where the water-springs are so rare and scanty, and the rays of the sun so scorching; or that he was to be sent to some newly discovered and yet

unpeopled land, where a man is sure to have a hard time of it, unless he takes a stock of needful things with him;—and yet the man knowing all this, knowing that he must go sooner or later, knowing that he may be called to set out at a moment's notice, makes no preparation for his journey, is not even at the pains to acquaint himself with the nature of the country he is going to, consults no books, asks no questions, takes no steps to ascertain the soil and climate, to find out how to guard against any diseases which may prevail there, or how to lead a comfortable and happy life when he gets there,—what would the worldly-wise say of such conduct in any man? Would they esteem it wise? Would they not censure and ridicule it as arrant folly? Yet what is the improvidence of the traveller, who makes no preparations for his destined journey to the wilderness, or to the desert and unpeopled land, when compared with the carelessness and the madness of those self-admiring sons of worldly wisdom, who go on year after year without making a single preparation for death, and the judgment, which they must needs know will certainly come after death, who go on without a thought or care for heaven. The Christian, fool as the world considers him, has certainly none of this wisdom. He thinks it best to suit his plans to his condition. Being aware that he is God's servant, he tries to live and act as becomes a servant of God. Knowing himself to be an heir of immortality, he is diligent to sow and foster in his heart the seeds of those christian graces, which are sure to outlive the grave. Trusting that he shall be admitted hereafter to dwell with Christ in heaven, he endeavours to prepare himself for that blissful state during the time he remains below, by seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of the Father.

Now what are those things? Generally we may be sure

that, by the things which are above, must be meant all such heavenly things as can be brought down to earth and understood here. Therefore every feeling and every disposition, which can gain admittance into heaven, and meet with favour before God, must be included among those things which are above, and which the apostle commands us to seek.

And first undoubtedly comes holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. But what is holiness? It is the likeness of God in the soul of man. God is the Holy One: and they who are fashioned after the likeness of his image, must needs be holy also. "Be ye holy, as I am holy," is the rule which God has given us in his law (Levit. xi. 44); and Jesus, the Holy One of God, has shown us how we are to keep it. But you will tell me that no man can make himself holy; since holiness is the gift of the Holy Spirit of God. True, my brethren, most true. Yet still it is necessary that you should become holy: and holy you may become, although you cannot make yourself so. For, in the first place, you can abstain from all those unholy and sensual deeds, which St. Paul reckons up in the Epistle to the Galatians, calling them works of the flesh. These works, drunkenness, revellings, uncleanness, and the rest, which are as opposite to holiness as darkness to light, and which stain and blacken the soul,—these foul and unholy works you can all abstain from. Indeed, if you are a Christian in truth, as I said above, you must be already dead to all such things. Next, you can all pray for the help of the Holy Ghost. But God has promised the Holy Ghost to all who pray for that help earnestly. "If ye, (says Christ) being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, much more will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." Therefore, if you pray for the Holy Ghost earnestly, he will come to you: if you con-

tinue to pray for him, he will dwell with you: and if he dwells with you, he will make you holy. Holiness then is one of the things above, which every Christian is to seek.

The second, which I shall mention, is love. God, St. John tell us, is love: therefore, as God is in heaven, love must be in heaven; and heaven must be the abode of love. Hatred can no more gain admission into heaven, than murder: for he that hateth is a murderer; that is, in his bosom he cherishes that poisonous seed of ill-will and malice, which when ripened by provocation and opportunity, brings forth the deadly plant of murder. I do not say, that everybody who harbours a grudge against his neighbour, would be ready to kill him, if he could do it secretly. In very many cases such a wicked thought never crosses the hater's mind. Were he taxed with being a murderer, he would answer, as Hazael did, when the prophet Elisha told him of the cruel deeds he was about to perform, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great and horrible thing?" Do you think me so abominably wicked, so utterly lost to all sense and feeling of human kindness, as to commit this foul crime? Hazael at the moment thought he could not commit such a crime. Yet the very day after his return to the king of Syria, "he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died." (2 Kings viii. 15.) In the same way, so deceitful is the heart, and, when unchecked by religion and by the Spirit of God, so prone to every kind of wickedness, that the man who suffers himself to hate another, can never be sure where he will stop. He has the cockatrice-egg of murder in his bosom, an egg which by God's grace may never be hatched: but there it is; and, if a man allows his mind to brood on it, who can tell what mischief may ensue? Therefore God, who foreknows things before they come to pass, and who beholds the effect in the cause,

the action in the motive, has declared that hatred is murder, because it is the root of murder; just as he has declared lust to be adultery, because it is the root and spirit of adultery. If the murderer of his neighbour will be shut out from heaven, so will the hater of his neighbour. If the first can gain no entrance into the new Jerusalem, neither can the other, until his hate be melted into love. Love then is one of the things above, which a Christian is to seek. But what kind of love? A real, sincere, hearty, earnest, fervent, active love,—a love "not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth,"—a love like the love of Jesus Christ, who went about doing good,—a love striving to be like him who left the glories of heaven to die on the cross for our sakes.

The third of the things above, which I would have you seek, is peace. Christ is the Prince of peace. When his warfare and ours against sin is accomplished, when Sin and Death have been cast into the lake of fire, then will the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the peacefulness of Christ's kingdom be fulfilled, and peace shall be for ever upon the Israel of God. Those therefore, who would begin their heavenly life on earth, must be careful seekers after peace, avoiding all strife, shunning all bitterness and evil-speaking and contention, and even waging the war, which we are bound to carry on against wickedness, in a mild and peaceful spirit. For these are the Christian's surest arms, —forgiveness, gentleness, patience, steady and persevering kindness; and hard indeed must be the heart which they cannot pierce and subdue.

Lastly, we must seek truth. For God is truth, and loveth truth. All lies, on the other hand, all manner of falsehood and deceit, all underhand tricks and juggling and cheating, come from the devil, from him who is a liar, and the father of lies.

Now observe how all these christian graces strengthen

and support and fit and dovetail into each other, thus supplying what at first might seem wanting, so that by the union of them all the servant of Christ is thoroughly furnished and supplied for every good work. Might love and gentleness weaken the character, and unfit it for walking in the rougher paths of duty, from fear of giving offence? We are commanded to follow after truth; and thus will that weakness be corrected. On the other hand, has truth a sternness, which might frighten sinners away, instead of winning them over and reclaiming them? We are charged, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, to restore him in the spirit of meekness." (Gal. vi. 1.) Thus what might be too severe is to be softened by the gentleness of the affections; and what might be too weak is to be strengthened by upright straightforward principle. It is this union of principle and of love, of everything most zealous in action with everything most patient in endurance, that made up the perfect beauty of our Saviour's character, while he lived on earth; and if we are his people, his disciples, his followers, his brethren, we must endeavour to grow like-minded with him. If we are indeed risen with Christ, we must set our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

XIV.

THE ASCENSION.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men: yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

THE Psalm from which these words are taken, was written by David to celebrate the removal of the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem. The fullest account of this event you will find in the 15th chapter of the first Book of Chronicles, where we read that David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with joy. It must have been a glorious sight to see David, and the singers, and the Levites who were carrying the ark upon their shoulders, with its golden staves, all in their robes of fine linen, and then the thousands and tens of thousands who were following with shouts and music. To see this procession moving up Mount Zion, to the sound of trumpets and psalteries and cymbals and harps, while the singers were singing with heart and voice the beautiful 68th Psalm, which David had written for this great occasion, must indeed have been a glorious sight, and one to make the heart of every pious Jew leap within him. But we are not Jews: the splendour of the Levitical service has passed

away: the ark itself has perished: and so many things concern us more nearly than the Jewish feasts and ceremonies considered in themselves can do, that, if the 68th Psalm spake of nothing greater than the recovery of the ark from the Philistines, and the carrying it up the hill of Zion, beautiful as that Psalm is, I should not have gone to it for a text, at least at the present season. But we know from St. Paul (Ephes. iv. 8), that it does speak of an event beyond all comparison greater and more interesting to us, and that, while David perhaps only meant to celebrate the bringing back of the ark of the covenant from a heathen land, and the bearing it triumphantly up the sacred hill, the Holy Ghost led him to sing of Christ's return to heaven after his abode on this wicked earth.

The same is the case with many other prophecies. We are not to suppose that the prophets in every instance knew that they were inspired to speak of some great and distant event. In many cases they seemed to have designed to write about the things which happened to interest the Jewish people at the time. But it was ordained by the Holy Ghost that their words should have a further meaning: so that what they said about matters near at hand, should be prophetical of greater matters afar off. Thus for example in the Song of Solomon, the immediate subject doubtless is the marriage of Solomon and his Egyptian bride. Still a greater than Solomon is there: and the union of our Saviour and his Church is the chief thing treated of. Thus too the 45th Psalm was probably also written in honour of Solomon and the Egyptian princess. But, under the figure of this marriage, the majesty and grace of Christ's kingdom, and its increase among the Gentiles, are the real things prophetically described. Thus again, when the heart of king Ahaz, and the hearts of his people were troubled by the tidings that the king of Syria and the king of Samaria were

coming up to war against them, Isaiah was sent to comfort and assure them that the league should come to nothing. Now what was the sign promised? That "a virgin should conceive and bear a son, and that they should call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us:" a prophecy which evidently points to the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, and which cannot be said to have been fully accomplished until Jesus Christ was conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. Lastly, not to multiply examples, the very Psalm from which my text is taken, was certainly intended to celebrate the return of the ark of God to Jewry: and so it did: but it likewise celebrates the return of the Son of God to heaven.

Such prophecies are called double prophecies; because they relate to two things, one of them usually near at hand, and comparatively unimportant, the other far off, and of very great importance. Now a remarkable thing about these double prophecies,—and it well deserves notice, as being the clearest proof that they were inspired,—a remarkable thing in these double prophecies is, that the words used in them are often better suited to the more distant and greater of the two events, than to the matter which the writer himself had in view. So is it for example in the Psalm before us. Look at the words of the text; and you will find that they do not apply to the bringing back of the ark so closely, they do not fit it so exactly, nor describe it so faithfully, as they describe the ascension of our Saviour. For what is the first thing asserted in them of the ark? That it had gone up on high. And so it did, in a certain limited sense; for the hill of Zion is a high hill. But what is the height of the hill of Zion, when compared to those highest heavens whereunto our Lord ascended? Of him then, far more than of the ark, can it be truly said that he went up on high. So with regard to the rest of the text,—"thou hast led

captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men: yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them,"—apply these words to the ark, and they seem too great for the occasion, glorious as that occasion was. Apply them to the ascension of the Son of God, and we feel them to be no more than the simple truth. For he did indeed lead captivity captive; he did indeed receive gifts from his heavenly Father to bestow on his enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

Is not this now passing strange and wonderful, that when a man means to speak of one thing, he should use words which are found to apply much more closely and accurately to something else, something at a great distance, something which in all probability the speaker little thought of? Wonderful it certainly is; and many would say, it is unaccountable. But we will not call it unaccountable: for we are able to account for it very easily. We know from St. Peter (2. i. 20), that no prophecy is of private interpretation: that is, prophecies were never meant by God to refer solely to the events of the times when they were spoken; but they pointed far into the future, to the coming of the Son of God. So that the prophets themselves did not understand them. They spake, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit: the words they uttered were not their own words, but such as God put into their mouths. Their tongues were guided and over-ruled by the Spirit of God himself, to bear witness to the divinity, to the birth, to the sufferings, and to the glories of the blessed Jesus.

Having thus explained the nature of these double prophecies to you, I shall lead you step by step through the particular prophecy in the text. It consists of four several parts. Thou hast gone up on high; thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men; yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Each of these will furnish us with matter for a distinct head:

the first two may be considered now; the others I must keep for another day.

First then, our Saviour has 'gone up on high:' that is, he went up from earth in his human form, and was exalted far above all creatures to the right hand of God the Father. I need scarce repeat what I have said to you before, that, when we speak of the right hand of God, we use what is called a figure of speech. God is a Spirit. God has no body, as we have: therefore he cannot have hands. Still the expression is a very good one, and not hard to be understood. We are assured by it that, just as an earthly king would place his favourite son next to himself on his right hand, this being accounted the post of chief honour,—so the highest place in the universe, the greatest honour, the nearest and closest intimacy with the almighty and eternal Father, were all bestowed on Jesus after he ascended into heaven.

But how do we know this? We know it first from St. Stephen, who, "being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God:" that is, he saw that bright and shining light, which was always understood by the Jews to betoken God's more immediate presence; and he saw Jesus standing at the side of it: "and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." Again we know it from St. Paul, who, as he was journeying to Damascus before his conversion, on the way saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, the very light which Stephen saw, and called the glory of God; and he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" And when Saul answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" the voice said to him, "I am Jesus." We know it also from several passages of the New Testament, in St. Matthew, in St. Mark, in St. Luke, in St. Peter and St. Paul's Epistles: in all

which passages we are told plainly that Christ is seated at the right hand of God, at the right hand of power, at the right hand of the Majesty on high. That Christ went up into heaven, we likewise know, because the apostles saw him ascend. Hear St. Luke's account of this, as it is written partly at the beginning of the Acts, and partly in the last chapter of his Gospel. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and lifted up his hands and blessed them; and while he blessed them, he was parted from them: and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, and said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Christ therefore ascended in a bodily shape: the man Jesus is gone up into heaven, and there, O great and wonderful exaltation! is sitting at the right hand of God.

Yet why do I call it a wonderful exaltation? If we look into the matter, we shall be satisfied, I think, that the ascension of our Saviour had nothing wonderful in it: and the same may be said of his resurrection. For just consider who our Saviour was,—that he was the Son of God most high,—that he was Immanuel, or God with us,—that notwithstanding his merciful humility in taking our mortal form, he was that eternal Word, of which St. John says, that in the beginning he was with God, and was God. How then can we wonder that this Divine Being, though he did vouchsafe to die for our sakes, though he allowed himself to be put to a shameful death,—can we wonder that his death should have been different from other deaths, and that his Father did not suffer him to lie unheeded in the grave? Hear what St. Peter says on this point in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. "Him God raised up,

having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." (Acts ii. 24.) For God would never leave the human soul of his Son in the region of departed spirits; neither would he suffer the flesh of his Holy One to see corruption.

You hear what this great apostle says, that it was not possible for Jesus to be kept prisoner in the grave. At first, when the apostles were told of their Lord's resurrection, they deemed it an idle tale, because then they knew not the Scriptures. But when their understandings had been opened, when Jesus had explained to them the various prophecies in the Old Testament about himself, and they had learnt to know that he was indeed the Son of God, then the truth flashed upon their minds. How could we be so ignorant as to suppose that death could get the mastery over the Prince of life? Hence they declare to the people in their very first sermon, that it was impossible, in the highest and deepest sense of the word, impossible according to God's justice, impossible according to God's love, impossible according to God's truth, impossible according to Christ's own divine nature that he should not have risen from the dead. And having thus risen, what had he to do more on earth? The earthly purposes for which he came were accomplished. He had fulfilled the law of God by a perfect life: he had suffered the penalty of the law by a shameful death: he had been offered a spotless sacrifice and sin-offering for the sins of the world: he had provided his Church with teachers and with sacraments, to instruct and support his people: having done all this, he had completed his work below, and naturally went home to heaven. Wonder not then either at the Resurrection or the Ascension. It is not wonderful that the Lord of life should have burst the bonds of death. It is not wonderful that the Son of God, after finishing his appointed task, should have gone back to

his loving Father. The true wonder is, that he should ever have come down from heaven, that he should ever have been made man, that he should ever have died. The birth of Christ, and the death of Christ, his meekness in taking our nature upon him, his mercy in submitting to be crucified for our offences, these are the things to wonder at, and not the Resurrection and Ascension.

I have said that Jesus, before his Ascension, had finished his appointed work. This brings me to the second head of my text, that he led captivity captive. For though Christ is in one sense the Prince of Peace, because he came to make peace between God and man, and to open a way for reconciling the truly penitent to their offended but still loving Father, yet in another sense, he is the Captain of our Salvation; because in this world of sin and strife the only road to peace is through war. Hence our Saviour, in many prophecies of the Old Testament, is described as a mighty warrior: for instance, in the 45th Psalm, where we read as follows: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things: thy arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies." Here you see Christ represented as a captain going forth to war with sword and arrows. I need not remind you that, as the warfare spoken of was a spiritual warfare, so the weapons of that warfare were spiritual weapons. But the struggle was not the less real, nor the less dangerous on that account. It was a battle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness. With these had Jesus to contend from his birth to his death. He had to fight in the shape of man against those tyrannous enemies of man, sin and death. The first he conquered by his holy life: the last he conquered by his resurrection. This is

called leading captivity captive; because, before the time of Jesus, sin and death were holding the human race captive in their hard bonds. These bonds Jesus brake: he threw open the prison doors, so that all who please may come forth: and then, having vanquished those who had vanquished all before, he ascended in triumph to heaven, leading the captors captive.

Sin and death, then, are both captives to Jesus Christ. But if they are captives to him, they are likewise captives to his servants. Therefore we need not fear them, provided we are his servants, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. How then is it that we so often hear Christians saying, they cannot help this or that sin? In a heathen, or even in a Jew perhaps, such language might be natural and pardonable. But in a Christian, for whom Jesus has broken the strength of sin, and plucked out the sting of death,—in a Christian's mouth such language would indeed be strange, were it not so common that we forget how strange we ought to deem it. If you cannot help your sins, what are you better than the heathens? What has Christ done for you by leading captivity captive, if you remain still enslaved to sin? And if you cannot help your sins, it is evident you are slaves: for slavery is nothing but unwilling service. He whom his master can compel to serve him, whether he will or no, is the slave of that master; he therefore, who is compelled to serve sin, must needs be the slave of sin, and if so, of Satan too. Reason and Scripture agree in this. Hence, when the apostles are recounting the benefits we have received from Christ's coming, they generally put in the first rank, that his victory has made us free from sin,—from sin, mind, and not merely from the punishment of sin. For men are apt to make a great mistake on this point. The deliverance they wish for is a deliverance from punishment. The deliverance which Christ offers them is a deliverance from sin.

Are the hearts of any of you, my brethren, deaf to this offer? Do you feel that you do not care for it? The reason of this deafness, this coldness, is too plain. It is because you love your sin. If you love that, you cannot love Christ. Do not mistake my meaning. When I spoke of your being free from sin, I did not mean that you would at once be made perfect, that you would be set free from every sin, as soon as you became sincere Christians. Still less did I mean that you would be free from all temptations. You will still be forced to watch: you will be liable to surprises. You will have a constant struggle, a warfare to maintain. A child is not born with the strength of a grown man; but he goes on and grows from strength to strength. So is it with the Christian: he too must go on from spiritual strength to strength. He will have enough to exercise him till the end of his course. But the difference which has been brought about in his favour by Christ's victory, is that his warfare will now be full of hope. As in time of war, when an English ship met a French one of equal force, the sailors were fully aware that the Frenchman would not yield without a blow, and thus went into action, knowing they must have a battle and a struggle for it, but never doubting of the issue; so will it be in your warfare against sin. You will go to the battle, not indeed rashly, nor unnecessarily, remembering that our Saviour has taught us to pray not to be led into temptation. Much less will you enter into battle trusting in your own strength, lest God, who resisteth the proud, should permit you to fall before your enemies. But when the temptation comes upon you, and you are called to withstand it, you will not be afraid to meet it, even if it were as big as a Goliath, but will face it in the name of the Lord, who enableth us to overcome our enemies. The honour of the victory will indeed be due to Christ, through whose might alone you can be conquerors: but though the merit

will be Christ's, and Christ's only, the rewards of his overcoming will be yours. For such is our Saviour's bountiful loving-kindness toward all who truly march under his banners, that he has made us these glorious promises by his servant in the Revelation: "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death: and I will make him a pillar in the temple of God: and I will grant him to sit with me on my throne; and he shall inherit all things."

XV.

CHRIST'S DISINTERESTEDNESS OUR PATTERN.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou hast received gifts for men.

IN my sermon on the first part of this verse, I shewed you that it contained a prophecy of our Lord's Ascension, and of his victory over sin and death. We saw how our Lord went up on high: we saw how he led captivity captive. The next thing declared of him in it is, that he received gifts for men: and this is the point on which I mean to speak to you to-day. It was the custom in ancient times, as it is now amongst us, that a victorious general, on his return from war, should be rewarded with great gifts, and tokens of favour and honour. To this custom we may suppose the Psalmist to refer in the first words of the text, coming as they do just after the mention of our Saviour's triumph and victory. Having told us that Christ had gone up on high, and had led captivity captive, the text goes on to say, that he has received gifts, that is to say, such gifts and honours as are the rewards of victory.

Now, that Christ after his Ascension was indeed rewarded by God the Father with the greatest rewards, and honoured with the highest honours, we know most certainly from Scripture. He was seated at the right hand of God most high: a name was given him above every name: honour

and majesty were laid upon him: he was set over all blessed for ever. All these rewards of victory our Saviour received. But these are not the gifts spoken of in the text. The honours and rewards I have just mentioned, were bestowed on our Saviour for himself: whereas the gifts in the text are said to be given to him for others. "Thou hast received gifts for men." So that a part of our Saviour's reward, for all he went through on earth, consisted in receiving gifts for men. But why do I say, a part of his reward, when this was in truth the whole of it? Everything which he received for himself on his Ascension, was merely a restoration to what was his own before. What new power or majesty or honour could be given to the Son after he took our flesh upon him, beyond what he had enjoyed from all eternity? When the Word became incarnate, he descended, he stooped, he humbled himself, he came down from the highest summit of power and glory for our sakes. When his work on earth was finished, he went home again, and mounted until he reached the same glorious height from which he had come. But he could not go higher. He was God before he came to earth: could he become more than God, when he went back to heaven? God is incapable of increase. If Christ was God from the beginning, then from the beginning was he enjoying the utmost glory and power and happiness: and to that utmost nothing could be added. Nothing can be higher than the highest; nothing can be greater than the greatest; nothing can be more blessed than the most blessed. The man Jesus indeed was very highly exalted: for in him, as the Athanasian Creed expresses it, the manhood was taken into God. The human part of Christ, the part which he inherited from his mother, became capable of being raised to glory and happiness unspeakable, and was so raised. But the divine part of Christ, which St. John calls the Word, and which had dwelt in the bosom of the

Father, could not receive any increase of glory or bliss, which must have belonged to him as God in their utmost fullness from all eternity. Therefore Christ, when he prayed to his Father the night before his Crucifixion to glorify him, did not ask for any new glory; for that he could not have: he only asked to be reunited to the Father, and restored to the glory which he had always had: "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

But if this be so, if God the Son could receive no new honour and dignity after the Ascension, greater than he enjoyed before the Incarnation, what did he gain, if I may use such a word in speaking of God, what did he obtain, what was his reward and recompense for coming down to earth, and suffering so much during his stay here? My brethren, he gained our happiness. This was the only reward he looked to, and the only recompense he could have. The only gifts he did or could receive were for men. This is what sets the goodness of our Lord and Saviour in the strongest light. It shews that he underwent everything simply and purely for our sakes. We, if we are called on to give up anything for God, are lured to do so by great and precious promises. We are told that whatever we give up for his sake shall in the end be made up to us a hundredfold. We are assured that our light afflictions, which last but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Yet all this will not do. Notwithstanding all the rewards set before us, scarcely one in twenty can be found to give up a single earthly passion, a single fleshly lust, a single foolish vanity, a single angry feeling, a single wrongful gain, a single sin, to the God who made, and to the Saviour who has redeemed us. But Christ gave up all the glories of heaven for a season, without the possibility of gaining anything for himself,

merely to do us good. His coming was to save us. His dying was to atone for us. His very rewards for all his sufferings and humiliation, for his perfect obedience to his Father's will, and his glorious victory over his Father's enemies,—his rewards for all these things are gifts for men. My brethren, there are some blasphemers of God and our holy faith, who, because our heavenly Father has been pleased to promise his faithful people an eternal inheritance of glory, taunt us with serving God from interested motives, and charge the Gospel with teaching men to be selfish. This taunt is not a new invention. It is as old as the time of Job: of whom Satan, when he could find nothing else to bring against him, said, "Does Job serve God for nought?" But is the charge true? Is it true that the Gospel teaches men to be selfish? The Gospel teaches men to follow Christ. This is the sum of it. Do as Christ did; think as Christ thought; act as Christ acted. Was Christ selfish? Was it selfish in the only-begotten Son of God to come down from his throne of greatness for the sake of us miserable sinners? Was it selfish in him to become the Son of man, and die a shameful death, that we might be made sons of God, and raised to a life of glory? Was he selfish, when the very prize of his victory is only gifts for men? Such is the selfishness which the Gospel sets before us,—to do everything, and to suffer everything, in obedience to God, and for the good of men. The Gospel rule, given us by Christ himself, is, that as he hath loved us, so should we love one another. As he hath loved us: that is to be the measure of our love for one another. Therefore our love for each other should be without bounds: it should be a disinterested love: it should be a self-denying love: it should be a love not easily provoked. If it fail in any of these respects, it will be very unlike the love which Christ has left us for a pattern.

First, our love should be without bounds. When it is in our power to do any real good for our neighbour, we must not shut our hearts against him with such thoughts as these, —"I have done enough for him already: I will do so much for him, and no more." If Christ had set any bounds to his love for us, where should we all be now? We need not be afraid that we shall go too far in serving others, unless we tie ourselves up not to go beyond a certain point. There is no danger that any of us will ever go too far in the walk of active love. There is no likelihood that any of us will become too bountiful, too friendly, too kind, too helpful to his neighbour. Human nature will be sure to stop quite soon enough. The real danger lies the other way, lest we should stop too soon. For though we are none of us likely to do too much for our neighbour, we are all of us likely to do too little. Therefore this is the danger we are to guard against.

But you will ask, perhaps, are there then no bounds at all to the good we are to do for others? I answer, that, provided the good be a real good, and the doing it does not cross any plain duty, or break any express command of God, I know of none, and can find none in the New Testament. The good of course must be a real good: it must be such a good as true love would prompt us to do, and true wisdom would approve. Had we the riches of Solomon, we should not be called upon to give a guinea to every beggar or to clothe the children of the poor in silks and satins: not because the expense would be too great; but because, by so spending our money, we should be doing more harm than good. By giving a guinea to every beggar, we should be encouraging idleness, which is a bad thing: by dressing up poor children in rich clothes, we should give them a fondness for finery, which is a bad thing. Therefore, the money so spent would be squandered foolishly and

hurtfully, in fostering evil habits: and this of course we ought never to do. Nor are we called upon, or allowed, to do good to our neighbour to the neglect of any plain duty, or to the breach of an express command of God's. We must not go abroad to nurse a sick neighbour, when our mother is lying ill at home: because our duty to her comes first. We must not rob, for the sake of relieving a person in need: because God has said, "Thou shalt not steal." We must not tell a lie, to help a neighbour out of a scrape: because God has said, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." So we must not, under a mistaken notion of hospitality, make the people that come to our house drunk: because God has forbidden drunkenness; and we are not to put temptations in the way of others, nor to be partakers in other men's sins. This is the meaning of the command, that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. All that we may do for ourselves, we are to do for him, if need be. But a thing which we are forbidden to do for ourselves, we are forbidden to do for him likewise, let him wish and ask for it ever so much. We must not get drunk ourselves; and therefore we must not make our neighbour drunk. We must not lie to screen ourselves; and therefore we must not lie to screen him. We must not steal for ourselves; and therefore we must not steal for him either. In a word, we must not do wrong to please another person, any more than to please ourselves. Mark this, ye young women, who are so liable to be led into wickedness, under the sacred name of love: mark this, and do not allow your best and kindliest feelings any more than your worst, to be turned into engines against your souls. But in everything right and good, in everything that reason approves, in everything that would be of real service to our neighbour's soul or body,—in these things we cannot do too much for him, if we would follow Christ: for Christ's love to us was boundless.

Moreover our love must be disinterested. We must not do a service to our neighbour, from a hope of getting back the same or greater in return. This would be trading and bartering, not loving. I do not mean that we are to refuse to receive help and kindness on occasion from those whom we may have assisted. This would betoken a proud and sullen spirit. A man should know how to accept a favour, as well as how to bestow one. But in doing a kindness to another we ought not to count on a return. Much less ought we to narrow our kindnesses to such as are able to return them, but rather should rejoice to prove the disinterestedness of our christian love, by doing good to the needy, who can make us no return, and even to the thankless, who will not. For so our Saviour teaches us: "If ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great; and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil." (Luke vi. 33-35.)

Again, our love should be self-denying. What is the value of services which cost the doer nothing, in comparison with those which cost him pains and trouble? It is the pains a friend will take to serve you, the sacrifices he will make for your sake, that prove his love to be sincere. A man may do many kind things from good-nature and easiness of temper: but call on him to exert himself, to deny himself, to put himself to trouble, to undergo a little hardship and privation on your account; and you bring his affection to the trial. If it stand this test, you may trust it. What is true of friendship between man and man, is equally true of christian love. No deed in which there is not some sort of

self-denial, can have any right to the glorious name of a deed of charity. Here let me point out to you an advantage which the poor have in this respect, although perhaps few of them are aware of it. It is an easier matter for a poor man to be charitable, than for a rich man. "What! (you exclaim) how can a poor man be more charitable than a rich man? when the rich man may give away his hundreds, or, if he is very rich, his thousands, and not miss them; while a poor man cannot even give a penny or a crust of bread, without feeling the loss: he cannot even go to help or nurse a friend, without forfeiting a part of his wages." True: and for this very reason,—because a poor man cannot do any service to his neighbour without some loss, some self-denial,—it is easier for him to shew the sincerity of his christian love. He who for Christ's sake shares his one loaf with the hungry, casts more into the treasury, than they who out of their abundance scatter hundreds or thousands they will never miss. I know, when one hears anybody called charitable, one takes it for granted that he must have plenty of money: and it is a very rare thing to hear poor persons so called. Yet I trust it is not rare for them to be so. Piteous indeed would be the condition of the poor, if their poverty shut them out from the noblest privilege which God has bestowed upon mankind, the privilege of helping each other, the privilege of shewing christian charity in the various exercises of brotherly love. But it does not. If any of you have ever fancied that, because you are poor, you have nothing to give, and that the duties of christian charity do not concern such as you, drive such a notion out of your minds. The poorest of you may do as much,—what in God's eyes will be accounted as much,—as the richest can do. You of your poverty may give your all; and they at the utmost can do no more. This however they may do too. They may make sacrifices

in various ways, though not so easily as you can. They may shew their love by giving their time, by giving their labour, by giving their thoughts, by giving up their tastes, by giving up their prejudices. They too may go forth, like St. Paul: though the weakness of men nowadays will hardly come near the graces of that holy apostle, they too may go forth in the service of Christ to minister to their brethren, "in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings and cold." That is to say, there is no outward hindrance to keep them from doing so. If the love of Christ burns in their hearts, as it did in his, they may do so. Nay, unless they do this in one way or other, unless they deny themselves for the love of Christ and of their brethren, the love of Christ and of their brethren has no place in their hearts.

One way in which this self-denial must be shewn is in overcoming our passions. Our love must not be easily provoked. Charity, the apostle tells us, suffereth long, and is kind. It takes its pattern from the long-suffering of Christ. Ever since the fall of Adam the sins of mankind had been provoking God to wrath: yet God would not be provoked, save to a far more exceeding and wonderful display of his love. Instead of baring the arm of his vengeance, and cutting us off in our iniquity, he stretched forth the arm of his mercy, and sent his Son to bring us back to the fold. It is only when love will not be provoked, except to fresh deeds of love, that it proves itself to be pure, and thoroughly disinterested, and to spring from the only pure source, the love of God and of Christ. For even the natural man desires to be loved by his brethren, and will love them for the sake of gaining their love: but when the natural man finds that his love is only met by thanklessness, it fades and dies. Christian love on the other hand in its outward workings is like God's love: it embraces the thankless as well as the thank-

ful. Nay, as God has done more for sinners, than ever could have been done for man, if he had continued in righteousness, so will christian love be most active and diligent in trying to soften and win the hearts which need it the most.

Such must be our love, if we would shape it into any likeness to Christ's love for us, of which at best it can never be more than a very faint and lame copy. For his love was truly boundless; ours will be cramped and hemmed in on every side by the weaknesses and wants of our nature. His love was perfectly disinterested; ours is evermore disturbed by the wish for some manner of return. He gave up the glories of heaven; we can only give up a little of the dross of earth. He forgave sins without number and excuse; we can only forgive what we have no right to resent. Feeble however and unworthy as our love may be, it is the only return we can make to Christ; and as such, Christ vouchsafes to accept it. The love which we shew to our brethren, he vouchsafes to accept as shewn to himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it," he says, "to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." The one object for which Christ came down on earth, was to make men holy and blessed. The one reward which he received when he went home to heaven, was gifts for men, to make them holy and blessed. This then, my brethren, if we love Christ, is what we must strive to do for Christ. We must strive to work under the guidance of his Spirit, in order to win souls for him, in order to help our brethren on along the road of holiness and blessedness. In this work we may all do something: in this work every Christian may be a fellow-labourer with Christ. Christ's reward on his Ascension, I have said, was the bestowing gifts on men. But that is only for a time, only as the means toward the reward which he will receive on the last day. That will be his true reward, the

reward for the sake of which he died, the reward for the sake of which he is still ever giving gifts to men. In the day when he makes up his jewels, in that day will the souls of all those whom he has redeemed be gathered into a crown of glory around his eternal head. Every soul that is saved will be a jewel in Christ's crown: every soul that is lost will be a jewel out of Christ's crown. Woe then, bitter woe, to those through whose fault a jewel is lost out of Christ's crown! How will they dare make answer, when he asks them, Where are my jewels? Blessed on the other hand, most blessed on that day, will they be, through whose patient endurance in christian love any jewels for Christ's crown have been gained.

XVI.

CHRIST'S GIFTS.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou hast received gifts for men, yea, even for thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

IN my last sermon on this verse I set before you the wonderful goodness and love manifested by our Lord and Saviour in coming down from heaven so entirely for our sakes, that his very rewards were gifts for men. He went through all, and bore all, not for the sake of receiving, but of giving, that he might as it were earn the privilege of bestowing greater graces and blessings upon us. But we shall take an imperfect view of our debt to him, unless we consider for whom Christ received these gifts, for whom he made so great a sacrifice,—namely, for his enemies. This is the point which the apostles urge so strongly, as the most wonderful and convincing proof of God's boundless love. Thus St. Paul says in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans: "While we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. Now scarcely for a righteous man will one die." Scarcely, he says: because one or two might perchance be found with courage enough to die for the sake of a good man and a good cause. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us." Again a verse or two after, "when we were enemies,"—the very word the Psalmist uses,—"we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." And again in the Epistle to the Ephesians, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ: for ye were strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world, but now ye are made nigh to him by the blood of Christ" (ii. 4, 12). St. John's words in the first Epistle are to the same purpose. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love;"—or this is the great, the astonishing proof of God's love,—that "before we loved God, God loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Truly, if we would give our minds to the matter, we must needs esteem it a very wonderful act of loving-kindness, on the part of the great Ruler of heaven and earth, to come to us poor worms, and entreat us to make peace with him. For to this it amounts. The Gospel message is, be ye reconciled to God. The Gospel doctrine is, that Christ came down from heaven, and died on the cross, in order that God, without doing violence to his holiness and justice, might hold out the sceptre of his mercy to us, and call us to him, and bid us live,—yea, live for ever,—and might offer us the countless treasures and endless blessings of his kingdom. This is the Gospel doctrine, that "God so loved the world,"—that world which, we are told in another place, lieth in wickedness,—"that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John iii. 16.)

Now does not this love far surpass anything we could ever have dared to hope for, if God had not plainly set it

forth in Scripture? Put the case of yourselves: are you so ready, even when you are in the wrong, to go to a neighbour and ask him to make it up with you? Yet God, who can never be otherwise than right, comes to us, and stretches out his merciful hands to us, and begs us to be reconciled to him, and to accept his pardon, and to cease from sinning against him, and to come to him for the gifts which his Son will give us here, and for the ten thousand other more glorious and precious gifts which are laid up for us above. The Son too himself is always saying to you,—yes, he says to you at this moment by me, his minister,—"Do not go on sinning in this headstrong way; take pity on yourselves; do not force me to condemn you; accept the forgiveness, and the graces and gifts of all kinds, which I have purchased for you with my blood. Do not stand aloof, because you feel yourselves to be sinners, and because you know that you have behaved like the enemies of God. Even if you are enemies, come: yea, come boldly. Even for my enemies have I received these gifts. Sinners, enemies, come for them, and take them."

Can any message be fuller of gracious love, than this which I have just delivered to you in the name of my Master, Jesus? And can you bring yourselves to reject it? Can you find it in your hearts to say, "Christ may hold out his hand to me; but I will not take it: he may call to me; but I will not come: he may knock at my door; but I will not open it: I will have none of his gifts: I will continue his enemy: I will not be reconciled to God?" If you heard a man saying such things with his mouth, what would you think of him? Would not you be shocked, and tremble for him, and be almost ready to fall down on your knees and pray God to forgive him his horrid words and wicked thoughts? My brethren, there are two ways of saying a thing. A man may say,—I will not be reconciled to God,

—with his lips; and you would shudder at his daring. But he may also say,—I will not be reconciled to God,—with his life: and if he is living in sin he does say so. Every man who is living in sin says, as plainly as deeds can speak, I will not be reconciled to God *now*. He may not always mean to say so, but he does say it notwithstanding; nay, and often means it too. When a man says, "I will repent and become religious next year," is not this the same as saying, "I will not become religious now. I will not make my peace with God as yet: I will go on in my rebellion against him a while longer?" Do not deceive yourselves, beloved brethren: open your eyes, and see the truth. The wicked man is God's enemy. He then who chooses to continue in wickedness, chooses to continue God's enemy. But why do I speak of continuing in wickedness as if gross wickedness were necessary to prove a man to be at enmity with God? The Scripture rule is clear: he that is not with me, is against me. He that is not with Christ, he that has not come to him, and is not serving him, that man is against Christ; and therefore he is against God. Against God! is any such here present? Alas! I fear there must be. I cannot flatter myself that every one who hears me is sincerely striving to please God; and if you are not, you are God's enemy. Young or old, it matters not,—richer or poorer, it matters not,—man or woman, it is the same thing, if you are not striving to serve God, you are God's enemy, in a christian church,—God's enemy, with the cross on your forehead,—God's enemy, with the grave, and the pit below the grave, ready to catch you, and opening their jaws wide for you, like wild beasts gaping for their prey. Shall we not shudder for you then, seeing you hanging by one single little thread of life, which an accident any hour may snap asunder? Yet by that one thread, if you are God's enemy, you are hanging over the pit of hell. Tremble,

tremble for yourselves: hasten to lay hold on the pardon and grace which Christ offers you: pray to him for those gifts, which the text tells us he has received for his enemies. But pray to him in good earnest, like a person who feels he is praying for his life,—as the disciples prayed when the storm overtook them, and they cried, "Lord, save us! we perish;"—as Peter prayed, when he was beginning to sink, and cried, "Lord, save me!"—as the Canaanitish woman prayed, who would take no denial: so pray thou. I say unto thee, whoever thou art, whose conscience tells thee that thou art God's enemy, pray thou with the same fervour as these did: and the same Jesus who stilled the raging storm, and upheld the sinking Peter, and cast out the unclean spirit from the Canaanitish woman's daughter,—will hear thee, and will help thee, as he helped them, and will pluck thee out of the mire of wickedness, and will deliver thee from the evil one, and will still the raging passions in thy breast, and will reconcile thee to thy offended Maker, and turn thee from an enemy into a penitent and obedient son.

Christ's reward, we have seen, consisted in receiving gifts for men; and that too at a time when the whole world were strangers and aliens from God; nay, when by following their lusts and the evil devices of their hearts, all mankind were at enmity with God; when they had set up other gods in the place of him who is the only God, and paid these all the worship and service which are rightfully due to him. Such was the state of the whole earth at Christ's coming: and even now such is the state of all those parts of it, where the religion of Christ has not yet taken root. It is of great importance to bear this in mind: because it proves that the whole of our salvation from first to last is the work of Christ's free and gracious love. Man neither did, nor can do, any thing to deserve it, or to give him any sort of claim upon

God for it. Mankind were not walking toward God, when Jesus came to seek them; they had turned their backs on God, and were walking away from him. It is true they had not the same advantages as we have now: they did not know their duty so clearly as we do now. They were living under a kind of twilight; for the Sun of Righteousness was not yet risen. But they had not made the most, or near the most of that twilight. The heathens had not profited as they ought to have done, or anything like it, by the light of nature. Full of holes and flaws as their philosophy was, it was ample enough to condemn them. Nor had the Jews profited as they ought to have done, or anything like it, by that treasure of theirs, the Old Testament. As the light of nature condemned the heathens, so the Old Testament condemned the Jews. Both had neglected and abused the means which God had afforded them for becoming wise and good. But, blessed be God! he did not forsake or cast off his sinful creatures, nor leave them to walk in their own darkness. Although they ran away from him, he only followed them the more: or rather he fetched a compass about, and came and met them in their wanderings. You remember the parable of the wicked husbandmen in the 21st chapter of St. Matthew. They paid their lord no rent for the vineyard he had lent to them; and when he sent his servants for his share of the fruits, they beat the servants, and stoned them, and killed them. Now call to mind how their lord treated them after all these wicked outrages. He did not turn them out of their farm, and punish them as they deserved: but he determined to give them another chance, and that a better than ever. He sent his son to them, saying, "They will reverence him." This parable is an exact setting forth of God's dealings with mankind, in calling them, when they were enemies, to a knowledge of his merciful Gospel. We had been unfaithful in a few

things; yet God entrusted us with many things. We had misused our means and opportunities: yet God said, "Your opportunities and means shall be increased tenfold." We had shut our ears against all the teachers sent into the world in former ages; nay, the Jews had been deaf to the voice of God himself, speaking to them from the top of Sinai: and God said, "What shall we do with man? I have sent him teachers of his own flesh and blood, and have enlightened them with my Spirit, and have given them the word of power; yet man will not repent and come to me. I have spoken to him myself out of a cloud on Mount Sinai, and have set my law plainly before him: and yet he cleaves to his iniquity. Still I will not utterly forsake him: one more trial is left for him in the counsels of my mercy. I will go to him myself: yea, the only-begotten of my love shall go and dwell with him in his own form; yea, in the form of a man shall he dwell with him. It may be he will hearken to him. Surely he will reverence my Son."

But they, who had always been enemies and rebels against the Father, now became the enemies of the Son. His meekness, his gentleness, his purity, his loving-kindness, his whole life spent in doing good to them, could not soften the hardness of their hearts. They laid hands upon him and slew him. They persecuted him during his life; and at length they nailed him as a criminal to the cross. Still even this did not move him to cast away his merciful purpose. While he was hanging on the cross, he conquered sin: and that victory he gained for his enemies. When he was laid in the grave, he conquered death: and this victory again was for his enemies. When he went up on high, he received gifts from the Father: and these gifts too were all for his enemies, for those very enemies whose sins had nailed him to the cross.

What however are those gifts, which Christ has received

for his enemies? This is the last question which remains for us, in order to fill up our view of this great and blessed subject. These gifts, so far as the Bible enables us to understand their nature, may be divided into two classes: the first consists of such gifts as Christ offers to men, while they are still his enemies; the second, of such as he bestows on those whom he has reconciled to God.

The gifts in the former class, which Christ offers to men while they are still his enemies, are two. But those two gifts are so excellent, that the happy man on whom they are bestowed has all that can be necessary for turning him from God's enemy into God's friend. He that has indeed received these two gifts into his heart, has ceased to be God's enemy: and so he comes within the circle of those further gifts, which are designed for such as are reconciled to God. Now what are these two excellent and wonder-working gifts, which have power to turn all such as receive them in a right spirit from God's enemies into God's friends? St. Peter tells us in the 5th chapter of the Acts, where, speaking to the Jewish council, he says of Jesus, "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Repentance and forgiveness of sins, then; forgiveness as soon as we repent, and the power to repent in order to our forgiveness, are the two gifts which Christ offers to men, while they are still enemies to God.

In the first place, he offers them forgiveness as soon as they have repented. So long as sinners continue in their sins wilfully, obstinately, and against their better knowledge, so long there can be no forgiveness for them. Christ has not procured our pardon, to the end that we may keep on sinning: but he has obtained the assurance of our pardon the moment we forsake our sins. He offers the fullest forgiveness to all his enemies, as soon as they repent and turn to God.

"And what boots, what avails such an offer to me?" many a sinner's heart will murmur: "What am I the better for being promised forgiveness after I have repented, when I feel too deeply I cannot repent?" To tear up all pretence for such a murmur by the roots, and to leave the sinner wholly without excuse, if he continues at enmity with God, Christ to his first gift of forgiveness adds a second gift of repentance. Not only will he forgive the sinner who repents: he will also enable him to repent, in order that he may be forgiven. Suppose one of you owed a rich man a hundred pounds: and that, instead of selling your goods, and throwing you into prison, he were to offer to forgive you the whole sum, on condition that you would thank him in writing, and give him a promise under your hand never to run in debt again. In such a case some of you would say, "Sir, your offer is very kind: but it will do me no good: for I cannot write." Now suppose the rich man were to answer: "Well then, I will teach you to write; and when you have learnt, you may give me the written promise which I ask." This twofold kindness on the part of the rich man, —in offering to forgive you your debt, if you would but thank him in writing, and in teaching you to write, that you might be able so to thank him,—is a sort of picture of our Saviour's goodness to his enemies, in not only promising them full pardon on their repentance, but enabling them likewise to repent that they may obtain the pardon.

Repentance and forgiveness then are the first two gifts which Christ offers to every sinner. If he accepts them, if he does indeed repent, if he seeks the forgiveness which is granted to all such as seek for it earnestly, his offences are blotted out, his debt is cancelled: he is changed from an enemy into a child of God: and is let in and becomes entitled to a share in the privileges which Christ bestows on his people. But if the sinner does not accept these gifts, if

he slights God's proffer of forgiveness, if he scorns the help which would enable him to repent, then does he continue an enemy to Christ, and a rebel against God: and as such, when the day of judgment comes, he will be delivered to the executioner. Therefore once more I call upon you, and say to you, Sinners, enemies of God,—if there be any such amongst us,—hasten to accept the repentance and forgiveness which Christ so mercifully sets before you. The repentance and forgiveness, I say: for you must take both, or neither. Christ will not part his two gifts. You must take them both; or you must leave them both: you cannot have one without the other. Unless you repent and turn to God, you will not, you cannot be forgiven.

Suppose however that we have profited by these first gifts, and through them been reconciled to our heavenly Father, then has Christ a second and larger class of gifts, to forward us in the way of holiness, and to bring us into the presence of God. For such is our Saviour's bounty, that nothing can set limits to his gifts, except our unfitness to receive them. If your heart be large, your thirst great, if your prayer to him for grace be fervent, you will receive more: if your heart be small, your thirst little, your prayer faint, you will receive less. Therefore St. Paul exhorts to covet the best gifts; because, in proportion to the strength of our desires, will be the gifts bestowed on us.

Of these spiritual gifts, which you ought to covet, the chief is the new heart and the new spirit, which are the mark of God's true children. None can be truly a child of God, unless he has been born of God. Now he that is regenerate, or born again of God, receives what the Bible calls a new heart. Thus it is written in the Book of Ezekiel: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them." The meaning of

this promise is clear: and the gift is one of the most precious that can be bestowed on man. A new heart! Much need in truth have we of a new heart: for the old one is bad enough. "Out of the heart (says our Saviour) proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, an evil eye, blasphemies, pride, foolishness." (Mark vii. 21, 22.) Ought we not to long to get rid of such a heart, and to receive a different heart in its stead? a heart pure and loving, kind and gentle, true and humble, holy and pious,—a heart that covets heavenly treasures, and does not vex itself about the pelf, the amusements, or the honours, which the old-hearted world are grasping after.

The new heart and new spirit, which Christ gives to his people, must surely be very precious. Nor can you be ignorant what is meant by it. Nicodemus, indeed, when our Lord told him that man must be born again, was simple enough to ask, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" But none can be so simple nowadays. Were such a question to be asked by any one now in a christian land, it could only be out of mockery and profaneness. When the Bible or the preacher speaks to you of this new heart and new spirit, none of you can be at a loss to understand, that by the new heart is meant a new feeling, leading to such a change in our affections,—and by the new spirit a new principle leading to such a change in our conduct,—that the alteration could scarcely be greater if we were made altogether anew. What then is this new feeling? what is this new principle? which Christ is ready to bestow on every one, when he has accepted his offer of pardon, and has forsaken his sinful courses, and is trying to live as the Gospel commands, and has begun to pray regularly, and to read his Bible, and to listen to sermons,—when, in short, he

has taken all those first steps which betoken a man's repentance, and shew that he is anxious about his soul. A man in this state will soon find how incapable he is of attaining to that inward purity and truth, which the law of God requires. Outward acts of sin he may get to abstain from: though even that, if he has been accustomed to any sinful practice, will cost him many a hard struggle. But purity of heart, meekness, patience, lowliness,—these, his Bible tells him, are the things which God looks for: and will he attain to these by his own efforts? Alas! he will soon find that, while the law is spiritual, he himself is carnal. He will find that, much as his reason and conscience may approve God's law, his fallen and corrupt nature is too strong for him. He will feel it hanging like a clog about his soul, and keeping it from rising up to heaven. If any of you, my brethren, are in this state, a state which St. Paul describes so touchingly in the 7th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans,—if any of you are ready to cry out in the bitterness of your heart, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"—remember St. Paul's answer: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." God is ready to deliver you from your thraldom through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is waiting to be gracious, if you will only ask him. Therefore, instead of despairing, and giving yourselves up for lost, and slackening your prayers as of no avail, redouble them. Pray to Christ your King; tell him that you need his gifts, that you need a new heart, that you need a new spirit; beseech him for his mercy's sake to send them to you, that you may be delivered from the bondage of your evil nature. Pray thus to our Lord and Saviour; and be assured he will hear you, and ere long will send you the new feeling and the new principle which are to change and better your nature.

This brings me back to the question which I asked a

while ago: what is this new feeling and this new principle, which are powerful enough to work such wonders, as to change the very wishes of our hearts, and to make our thoughts and lives savour of heaven? The principle is faith, that faith in praise of which St. Paul is so full and frequent. A degree of faith, which we will call belief, the Christian must of course have from the outset. He would never have left the service of sin, unless he had believed that the wages of sin is death. The threats which God denounces against the wicked, must have made an impression on his mind: else he would never have taken the pains of breaking off his evil habits. So must he have believed that God hears prayer: else he would not have prayed. He must have believed the Bible to be the word of truth, and must have been led by what is called the preventing or guiding grace of God,—that grace which comes and knocks at the sinner's heart, to rouse him from his deadly slumber,—he must have been led by that grace to apply the threatenings of the Bible to himself, and thus to feel his danger. This degree of belief every sinner must have, before he will begin to shake off his sins. But this is a very different thing from that mixture of belief and trust, which makes up a saving faith. Of this more perfect faith it is not too much to say, that it is strong enough to carry a man through all dangers, through all hardships, through all temptations, through all distresses, for the sake of him in whom we believe. In the words of St. John, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John v. 4.)

But if this principle be not sufficient for us, Christ has another equally powerful gift in store, in the shape of a new feeling to purify and strengthen our hearts, just as faith enlivens and strengthens our souls. This new feeling is love, the love of God, which marks the new-hearted or christian man, just as the love of self marks the old-hearted

or worldly man. Now this love and this faith may exist in Christians in almost every degree. There are babes in Christ, as well as grown men. But even babes live, and have a spirit and principle of life in them, and learn to love their father and mother, long before they have learnt to say so. Thus must it be with babes in Christ. Even they must have a principle of faith and a feeling of love toward God. If they have not, if they have not this new spirit, and this new heart, which always goes along with it, the christian life has not even begun in them. Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, and examine yourselves, whether you really love Christ, whether you have a hearty trust in God. Unless you have these only certain signs of a christian life in you, your Christianity is a dead letter and an empty show.

I feel sure however that some at least among you have these signs of a true christian life. Let us go on therefore a step further, and see what other gifts you are to look for. The Scriptures speak of many such, the gift of Christ's flesh, which is the Christian's food,—the gift of Christ's peace, which is the Christian's balm,—the gift of Christ's joy, which is the Christian's sunshine,—and finally the gift of an eternal inheritance, which is the Christian's reward and haven. But the largest gift of all, the gift in which all the others are embraced, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. "It is expedient for you," said our Saviour, "that I go away: for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you." (John xvi. 7.) To him is committed the whole work of our sanctification. It is he, the Holy Ghost, that makes us holy. He gives us that holiness, without which no man can ever see God. This indeed is the gift which the Psalmist seems to have had chiefly in view: for to this end, he tells us, did Christ receive gifts for men, "that the Lord God might dwell amongst them." Yes, my brethren, so wonderful is the

loving-kindness of our Almighty Father, so precious the gift which Christ has obtained for us, that the Holy Spirit of God has vouchsafed ever since to come down and dwell amongst us; and not only amongst us, but *in* us, in all such as come to Christ with a simple and faithful heart. For this is what St. Paul says to the Corinthians (1. iii. 16): "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" This question, which St. Paul put to the Church of Corinth, I put to you: know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? Beware therefore, dear brethren, lest ye defile the temple of God, by anything impure or sinful, whether in thought or word or deed: "for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

XVII.

HOLY BRANCHES;

OR,

WHY WAS THE TRINITY REVEALED?

ROMANS xi. 16.

If the root be holy, so are the branches.

THE purpose of our Saviour's coming was to redeem and deliver us from all iniquity, and to purify us as a peculiar people, zealous of good works. This is the great end of his teaching; and this end all the doctrines of his religion further. For instance, the doctrine of the everlasting pains of hell,—why has that been made known to us, except to frighten us from sin? Why again has the doctrine of the unspeakable joys of heaven been made known to us, except to comfort and encourage us in well-doing? In like manner all the other doctrines of our faith are designed either to warn us against going astray, or to quicken our steps along the right path, or at least in some way or other to keep us firm and steadfast in our duty. So that our religion may not unfitly be compared to a great tree; of which the doctrines are the roots, and uprightness is the trunk, and godly deeds and all the ministries of love are the outspreading branches, and piety is the heavenward pointing head. As a tree grows up from its roots, and they

nourish and support it; so do the duties of religion grow out of its doctrines, and rest on its doctrines, and draw their life from them. If the trunk of a tree be separated from the roots, it falls: nor will a man's morality be able to stand, unless it be rooted and anchored deep in the great truths of religion. Any hour of trial, a gust of passion, a sharp blast of temptation from an exposed quarter, would lay such unsupported virtue low. It would fall, like the house built on the sand; and great and sad would its fall be. But as a tree is nothing without its roots, so the roots on the other hand are nothing without the tree. It is for the sake of supporting the branching, wide-spreading tree, that there are any roots at all. No one ever saw a root growing by itself and for itself. A root without a tree would be the same sort of thing among God's works, as a foundation without a house among man's works. Nor is this less true of the spiritual roots of faith. God, who does nothing in vain, has not revealed any doctrine to us for the mere sake of feeding our curiosity, or of making us stare and wonder. Doctrines from which nothing springs would be as much out of place in the book of God's word, as roots from which nothing grows would be in the book of nature. Such roots are not living, but dead. Whenever therefore you come to any doctrine in the Bible, bear in mind that the Scriptures were not written to make us wise merely, in that which the world deems wisdom,—but wise unto salvation. Instead of stumbling over the doctrine, as a blind or heedless man might stumble over a root that lay in his path, and stood a little way out of the ground,—instead, I say, of stumbling over it, and being offended at it, say to yourselves, "Here is another root of godly living, a root which, if I can only plant it in my heart, is sure to bring forth a goodly tree of some christian grace or other."

Thus it is with all the great truths, with all the great

doctrines of our faith: nor is it otherwise with the greatest and most mysterious of all its doctrines, with the doctrine which embraces all the others, the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity. But what is the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity? Some of you may perhaps be glad to hear a short and simple explanation of it. And much does it behove you to understand what the Scriptures have revealed to us on this matter: seeing that it is the very doctrine into which you were all baptized, when you were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. On this great and wonderful mystery it becomes the ministers of Christ to speak, humbly indeed, but plainly and boldly, so far as Scripture bears them out,—no further. Where the Bible stops, we must stop too. Were you walking over a mountainous country, beset with steep and dangerous precipices, so long as the sun lit up your path, and shewed you a safe footing, you would go on cheerfully and fearlessly. Still safer and more confident would you feel, if an angel were leading you by the hand. But if the sun went down, if a thick mist arose, if the angel let go your hand, if you found yourself in this dangerous country without light and without a guide, would you go on then? Surely the true wisdom would be to stop the moment the light faded away, lest, by walking rashly on, you might stumble or slip into the jaws of death. Thus, when we are talking of the Trinity, so long as we keep within the bounds of Scripture, we may walk safely: for the light of God is upon us, and his angel is leading us by the hand. But when the Bible stops, we must stop also. Every step beyond the written word is dangerous, and rash and foolish.

Still, though it would be most unwise to follow the dancing lights of our own fancies, where the risk of a false step is so great, yet, as long as the light of the Bible is on our

path, we may, we ought, to go on, under the assurance that God has revealed nothing in his word, except what it behoves us to know. We may not be able to reach the very top: but let us mount as high as we can, keeping in mind that we are not walking by our own light, but by God's light, and therefore walking humbly, as befits those who can do nothing of themselves. For as an excellent writer has said, "What would it profit us to speak never so wisely of the Trinity, if by speaking proudly we offended the Trinity?" In this humble spirit would I speak, in this spirit would I have you listen to what I shall say, concerning the Holy Trinity.

"The Catholic faith (as you have just heard in the Athanasian Creed) is this: that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity." This is the Catholic faith; that is to say, the universal faith, the faith held by every faithful part and member of Christ's Church. By whatever name the various branches of that Church may be called,—Roman Catholics, Greeks, Lutherans, we of the Church of England, our brethren of the Church of Scotland,—however they may disagree and differ on other points,—and alas! these differences are so many and so violent, that Christ's coat, which was woven without seam from top to bottom, setting forth the perfect union which ought to subsist among true believers, has been shamefully rent and almost torn to tatters amongst them,—still, these many violent differences notwithstanding, the several churches of Christendom all agree in this, that they worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. Therefore this faith is called catholic, or universal; because it is held by all the churches. For this is the meaning of the word catholic: the Catholic faith is that which is held by all true believers: the Catholic Church is that which embraces and is made up of all true believers; and everybody is a member of that Church, who holds all

the great doctrines of the christian faith. This is the Holy Catholic Church which we profess in the Creed to believe in. This is the Catholic Church for which we pray in the prayer for all sorts and conditions of men, and in the Litany, where we call it the holy Church universal.

Now, the great doctrine of that Church, the doctrine which is held by every branch of that Church,—the doctrine by which whoever holds it becomes a member of that Church, while whoever rejects it ceases to belong to that Church, and becomes a heretic,—is the doctrine of the Trinity: that is to say, the doctrine that in the Godhead there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God: and that yet there are not three Gods, but one God. To the carnal understanding this doctrine sounds strange and hard to believe: it is strange and hard to believe, that three should be one, and that one should be three. Why then does the whole body of the Catholic Church hold this doctrine? Because it is plainly set down in Scripture. Because the Scripture tells us on the one hand that God is one, and on the other hand that the Father is God, that our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, the Word that was with God from the beginning, is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God. Because moreover we are convinced that it is not in man, by seeking, to find out God, and that we cannot know anything of God, except what God himself is graciously pleased to make known to us.

This then is the Catholic faith, that we acknowledge the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, to be each of them God, and yet that they are not three Gods, but one God. How these three Persons are so united as to make up only one God, we are nowhere told in Scripture: therefore on this, as with regard to so many lesser matters, we must be

content to remain ignorant. Does this seem a great hardship to the pride of the would-be wise? Let them come forward then, and prove their right to be admitted into the innermost mysteries of heaven, by shewing that they have fully mastered all the lesser mysteries of earth. Let them tell me why the needle of the compass always turns toward the north. Perhaps they will say, because it is its nature to do so. But that is no answer. My question is, why does the needle so turn? What secret and invisible hand twists it round, and teaches it to point always the same way? Or, if this be too puzzling a question, perhaps these wise men, who think it so great a hardship that they are not permitted to understand God, may tell us a little about themselves. They can perhaps teach us how it comes to pass that the blood keeps on flowing unceasingly through our veins without our being aware of it, except when we are in a high fever. We grow tired with labour, or with exercise; we tire even with doing nothing; we need sleep at certain seasons to refresh us for the taskwork of the morrow: but the blood never wearies. On it flows, from the hour of our birth, day and night, summer and winter; year after year it keeps on its silent round, never felt when we are in health, yet never stopping, and never sleeping, until it stops once for all, and sleeps the sleep of death. How, I ask, can these things be? What, again no answer! Tell me then at least, how it is that I dream; or if you cannot,—and no one can,—let those who know nothing about the how and the why in so many of the commonest earthly matters, not be so very much surprised that they cannot understand the essence of that invisible, that eternal, that infinite Spirit, whom we call God.

But though the Scripture has only told us that these things are, without teaching us how they are, yet for the sake of shewing that the mystery of the Trinity is not so

utterly at variance with what we find in earthly things, as unbelievers would fain persuade us,—for the sake of proving how possible it is, even according to our limited notions, for that which is three in one sense, to be one in another sense,—learned and pious men have busied themselves in seeking out likenesses for the Trinity among the things of this world. It is most true indeed, and should be borne in mind, that these likenesses must be very imperfect, and that they cannot give us anything approaching to a full and just idea of the glorious Trinity. For so the prophet teaches us when he exclaims, "To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare to him? Have ye not known? have ye not heard? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers: that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." (Isaiah xl. 18, 22.) To whom then, or to what created thing can we liken God, and not fall immeasurably below the glory of his infinite perfections? Still, although no likeness to which we can liken God, can be of any avail toward shewing him to us as he is, yet since so many find a stumbling-block in the mystery of the Trinity, and so many cast it as a stumbling-block in their brother's path, there can be no harm, and there may be some good, in comparisons, which shew that it is not altogether unlike what we find in the natural world. Moreover such comparisons may help you in attaching some sort of notion, though a very dim and imperfect one, to the words of your Creed, which declare that God is one, and yet that there are three Persons in the Godhead. They may keep these words from lying dead in your minds, or rather on your tongues.

One of the comparisons or likenesses I am speaking of is taken from the most glorious object which our eyes see, the sun. That ball of light and heat, which we call most pro-

perly the Sun, may be compared to the Father, from whom both the Word and the Spirit come. From this sun the light issues, and is as it were a part of it, and yet comes down to our earth and gives light to us. This we may compare to the Word, who came forth from the Father, and came down on earth, and was made man, and who, as St. John tells us, is "the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." But beside this there is the heat, which is a different thing from the light: for we all know, there may be heat without light: and so may there be light,—moonlight for example, and starlight,—without any perceivable heat. Yet the two are blended and united in the sun; so that the same rays, which bring us light to enlighten us, bring us heat also to warm us, and to ripen the fruits and herbs of all kinds which the earth bears. This heat of the sun may not unfitly be compared to the Holy Spirit, that Lord and Giver of life, as the Creed calls him, for heat is the great fosterer of life: as we see for example in an egg. As that is hatched by the warmth of the parent bird, sitting on it lovingly, and brooding over it, until it is quickened into life; just so does the Holy Spirit of God brood with more than dove-like patience over the heart of the believer, giving it life and warmth; and though he be driven away again and again by our backslidings, he still hovers round our hearts, desiring to return to them, and to dwell in them, and cherish them for ever. Moreover, if any seed of the Word has begun to spring up in any heart, the Spirit descends like a sunbeam upon it, and ripens the ear, and brings the fruit to perfection. Thus have we first the sun in the sky, secondly, the light, which issues from the sun, and thirdly, the heat, which accompanies the light, —three separate and distinguishable things: yet distinct as they are, what can be more united than the sun and its rays, or than the light and heat which those rays shed abroad?

The comparison which I have just set before you, is taken from the most glorious of the heavenly bodies known to us, the sun. Another is sometimes taken from the purest of earthly bodies, water. Here too we have first the fountain, high up among the rocks, far out of man's reach, answering to the Father; secondly, the stream, which issues from the fountain, and flows down into the valley for the use of man, and which may be likened to Jesus Christ, the Son; thirdly, the mist, which rises from the water, and falls in rain or dew upon the thirsty ground: this, I need hardly say, answers to the Holy Spirit, who in the days of the apostles came down visibly, like the rain, with a sound as of a rushing mighty wind, but who now descends gently and silently, like the dew in the silence of night, on the heart of the humble believer, to refresh it, to soften it, and to make it fruitful.

Do not mistake me, my brethren. I do not mean that these comparisons will enable us to understand the mystery of the Trinity; any more than a farthing rushlight will enable us to understand the sun. But supposing a man, who had never seen the sun, were to say, "it is impossible for the light to abide in the sun, and yet to be shed abroad over the earth," a farthing rushlight would suffice to shew him that the light, though it fills the room, may yet abide with the candle. In like manner the comparison I have been setting before you may suffice to convince you that the difficulty, by which so many have been offended, in the mystery of the Trinity, is not so irreconcilable with what we find in God's created works, as we are apt to fancy it. And this is all that we need. What God is in himself,—how the eternal Word is the only-begotten of the Father,—how the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son,—how the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost abide for ever in indissoluble union and unity,—these are questions of no importance to

the practical government of our lives. Therefore God has not thought fit to reveal them to us more clearly. That which it concerns us to know, that which is to act upon our hearts and souls, and through them on our conduct, has been declared to us. The holy root lies hid underground: the holy branches spread abroad before our sight, and offer us a safe shelter from all the evils of this world. Knowledge, a wise man has said, is power; but it is power only when we use it. Knowledge not applied, or misapplied, profits nothing. What good would knowing all the herbs and simples in the world do a sick man, if he did not use them to cure his sickness? Neither would it profit us to know the most secret mysteries of the divine nature, unless that knowledge helped us on in the paths of holiness and godliness.

But what, you may ask, are the practical uses and purposes, for which the doctrine of the Trinity was revealed to us? What good can it do us to know that the Son is God, and that the Holy Ghost is God, as well as the Father, and yet that there are not three Gods, but one God? What are the holy branches which spring from this most holy root?

Now, if the purpose and end of Christianity be, as it doubtless is, to bring us near to God in heart and life, it is easy to see, how much the revealing the doctrine of the Trinity to us is fitted to further that end. I say the revealing it to us: because there might have been a Trinity; the Son of God might have died to save us; the Holy Ghost might come and sanctify us; and yet we might know nothing of the matter. Even this would doubtless have been a great mercy, and a great blessing. But the having that mercy revealed to us so plainly,—the knowledge that these things are so,—the being made acquainted with the great works which have been done, and are doing by the Son of God and the Spirit of God for our sakes,—this

multiplies our debt, and makes the blessing and the mercy much greater.

For consider what would be the state of a sinner, on waking from his sin, if he did not know himself to be pardoned. What dread! what horror! what despair! what distracting thoughts of God's righteous indignation! What an ever-present vision of hell yawning to devour him! What a doleful voice ever ringing in his ears, Judgment! Judgment! Who could remain long in such a state? What mind could go on dwelling on such terrible and dismal thoughts, and not be driven mad? Yet this would be the state, the natural and reasonable state, of a sinner awaking from the sleep of sin, if he did not know of the propitiatory sacrifice which Christ has offered up for sin. But now that the good news of pardon and acceptance with God through the blood of Christ has been proclaimed to all who repent, the light of hope is let into the prison-house of sin: so that they who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, fast bound in misery and iron,—they who naturally could have nothing to look for but judgment and fiery indignation, for the misdeeds they have been wilfully guilty of,—for their drunkenness, for their lust, for their foul and evil-speaking, for the pains they have taken to learn mischief, for the opportunities of instruction and improvement which they have thrown away,—even these, on awaking from their slumber, and coming to a right mind, have only to lift up their eyes to heaven, to see the beams of mercy and forgiveness shining and ready to descend. They have only to take up their Bibles; and they will read there—what? That sin is a light matter? Far from it. That it does not signify whether a man goes on sinning or not? By no means. That God is easy, and will let sinners go unpunished? Quite the contrary. They will find that sin is hateful to God, that punishment must follow it, that

God "will by no means clear the guilty," but, according to their deeds, will repay "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." (Rom. ii. 9.) Yet in the midst of all these terrible passages, which so awfully represent God's justice, they will find the freest and fullest and most merciful promises of pardon for Christ's sake, to every one without exception who repents and truly turns to God in time. They will read that "the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7); that God gave his only-begotten Son in order that all true believers in him should have everlasting life (John iii. 16); and many other passages to the same effect. These will be sufficient, not to banish the sinner's shame and sorrow for his past life,—God forbid that they should!—but they will make that shame and sorrow bearable. They will prevent his soul from sinking to the earth under an insupportable fear of God's wrath. They will save him from that recklessness and despair, which harden the heart and make it devilish. Instead of looking on himself as an outcast doomed to eternal torment, he will get to feel that he is pardonable, yea, and already pardoned, if he will only return home to God. He will learn that, during all his wanderings, he has been followed with a watchful eye by his merciful and heavenly Father: and then the thought of having wilfully offended such a father, of having run away from him to go and eat the husks of sin,—that thought, coming with a prospect of forgiveness, will soften his stubborn heart, and will make him sorrow with the godly sorrow which worketh repentance not to be repented of. Such are some of the blessed effects likely to be produced in the sinner's mind, by knowing that Christ came down from heaven to suffer death for sinners. Here then you see the benefit of knowing at least so much about the Trinity, as to be aware of all that the second Person of it, the eternal and only-begotten

Son of God, has been pleased to do and suffer for our redemption.

The good of knowing what is done for us by the third Person of the Trinity is also very great and plain. It is a great benefit for us to have been taught that the Holy Ghost is ever ready to help us in our endeavours after holiness. I have set before you the case of a sinner, whose eyes have been opened to see the danger and the wickedness of offending God, and who is anxious to lead a better life. Let us follow this penitent a few steps on his road, and see what he will do next. Doubtless he will begin his reformation by studying the law of God; for to keep it, he must know it. The first steps will perhaps be easy enough. Not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, crimes like these he may never have had any mind to: at any rate now he would rather die than be guilty of anything so wicked. But on reading a little further, he meets with other commandments as difficult as the first were easy; commandments far surpassing the utmost reach of human virtue, such as "be ye holy as God is holy," and "perfect as God is perfect;" commandments the most contradictory to flesh and blood, such as, that we must love them that hate us, that we must deny ourselves, that we must take up our cross and follow Jesus; commandments reaching to the very smallest actions, and even thoughts, such as, that we must cleanse and purify our hearts, that we must bridle our very tongues. Now who is sufficient for such things? Who can hope, try he never so much, to become perfect like God? The more a man thinks what God is, and what great goodness he requires from us, the more he learns of the divine law, how exceeding broad and high and deep it is, the further he sees into the spiritual nature of the service which we owe him,—the more he must needs feel his utter inability to serve and obey God as he

ought to do. Here then a new despair threatens to overwhelm the penitent, a despair of being able to pay God a sufficient and acceptable service. He sees, and is forced to confess, to use St. Paul's words, "that the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good." But what does this profit him when the holiness of the commandment only shews him his own crookedness, but gives him no means of becoming upright? What does it avail him that he delights in the law of God and feels its excellence and purity so long as he sees another law in his members bringing him into captivity to sin, or at least crippling him from attaining to the purity he admires and longs for? Truly it avails and profits him just as much, and no more, than it profited the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda to be desirous of being made whole, and to lie on the edge of the healing waters, which he had not strength to step into. But thanks be to God! a remedy has been provided for this our natural weakness by the gracious kindness of the Holy Ghost; just as a remedy has been provided for our natural sinfulness by the blood-shedding of Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God takes the sinner out of the hands of the blessed Jesus: he nurses him; he cherishes him; he feeds him; he supports and strengthens him; and finally he takes up his abode within him and purifies him, and gradually changes his whole nature, filling him with love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. Surely the knowledge that the Spirit does all this is an inestimable benefit to the young Christian. It gives him courage: it excites him to persevere and struggle on: it sets before him the certainty of conquering, if he be not wanting to himself. Instead of crying out, as otherwise he might have done, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" he now exclaims, with humble confidence, "I can do all things, through

Christ that strengtheneth me: in spite of tribulation and temptation, through Christ I shall be more than conqueror."

Nor is it merely to the sinner, or to the penitent, that the knowledge of the Son and of the Spirit of God is a root yielding blessed fruit. To the true followers of Jesus Christ, to those who have already made advances in holiness, to those who have tasted and learnt how gracious the Lord is, —to such persons the knowledge of these great truths is still more precious than to any others. Think of knowing that you have a Friend, a Saviour, a prevailing Advocate in heaven. Think of knowing that you have the Spirit of all peace and joy and purity dwelling in you. Think of knowing that, come what will, you have an almighty Shepherd, who once died to save you, and who now ever liveth to protect you. "Who will harm you," says St. Peter, "if ye be followers of that which is good?" Let me wax bolder, and ask, what can harm you? What can harm you, if ye be followers of Christ? Can Satan, whom he has trampled on? can the world, which he made, and will destroy? can sin, which he expiated on the cross? can death, whose chains he burst at his resurrection? Fears then there can be none, except from human weakness, to the faithful followers of Jesus. Nor can there be doubts or lasting sorrow. What doubts can there be to that man, who hath God's word pledged for his salvation, and who has the promise of the Holy Spirit to teach him every necessary truth? As to sorrow, are we not expressly told that all things work together for good to them that love God? What room then to such blessed persons can there be for any lasting sorrow? Even that most incurable of earthly griefs, the grief for the loss of those who are gone before us,—even of that St. Paul speaks in these words: "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning

them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. iv. 13-18.)

The sum of the whole is this: though the nature of God must needs be mysterious to our understandings, there is no mystery in the benefits we receive from him nor any darkness in the duty we owe him. Without comprehending how the three Persons of the Godhead are united in one eternal God, we may glorify each for his excellent greatness and goodness to man. We may glorify the Father, the original fountain of all things, who sent his only Son to work out our salvation. We may glorify the Son, who undertook and has accomplished that salvation. We may glorify the Holy Ghost, who is graciously present with the faithful in Christ to write his words in their hearts, to comfort and succour them, and to lead them in the steps of their Redeemer to the gates of heaven which he has opened. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, were not revealed to us that we might be more knowing than the heathens. We were told of the Father, that we might obey the Father: we were told of the Son, that we might be delivered from our sins by the Son: we were told of the Holy Ghost, that we might welcome him into our hearts, and throw them open to receive him. What will it avail us to have heard of the Father, if we choose to be cast out for ever from his presence? what, to have heard of the Son, if we reject the atonement of his blood? what, to have been brought up in the knowledge of the Holy Ghost, if we despise his warnings, drive him from our hearts by our impurities, and remain, like Gideon's fleece, dry in the midst of so much moisture, unregenerate and unsanctified amid the largest offers of the freest and most overflowing sanctification? Do not deceive

yourselves so fatally, my brethren: do not repeat the error of the Jews. Do not fancy that knowing is doing, that right notions make a saving faith. True faith and true love, the trust in God and the love of God,—a trust shown by resignation to his will, a love proved by keeping his commandments,—these are the only things to rely on. Cling to them, and they will bear you through the world to heaven, where all mysteries will be cleared up, and all difficulties will be done away: for we shall be let into the presence of God, and shall see him as he is. And what is better, if possible, even than seeing and knowing God, we shall be ever growing more and more like him.

XVIII.

THE FOOLISH MOCKERS.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

Fools make a mock at sin.

"BLESSED is the man, (says David at the beginning of the Psalms,) who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, and hath not sat in the seat of the scornful." These words, it is plain, are meant to describe the course and progress of a wicked life, going on from bad to worse, until it arrives in the end at the most hardened and reckless impiety. Therefore *to sit in the seat of the scornful* must be a very dreadful state: inasmuch as it amounts, in the language of the Psalmist, to fixing oneself resolutely and boastfully in evil. In like manner the prophet Jeremiah, when speaking of certain persons from whose company and conversation he kept aloof, makes use of nearly the same expression: "*I sat not in the assembly of the mockers*" (xv. 17). Now who are these scornful persons, these mockers, whom holy men of old were so careful to shun? They are the very persons of whom Solomon is speaking in the text, the fools, as he calls them, who make a mock at sin. If you bear in mind what sin is, —that it is an open rebellion against the God of heaven, that it is a defiance of him who is Almighty,—you may

know what you ought to think of persons who are daring enough to make a mock at it. To make a mock is to speak lightly and slightingly of a thing, or, as we should say in common English, to make a jest of it. But what must be the state of a man's mind, when he can make a jest of offending God? Can he be in his senses? He has lost the most precious of all senses, the sense of right and wrong. Therefore the Bible, which takes no account of any wisdom, except that which goes along with righteousness in this world, and leads to blessedness in the next, calls all such persons fools: "Fools make a mock at sin." Angels, we have reason to believe, mourn for sin, and weep, if they can weep, over the state of sinners. How foolish then must that man be, who can laugh at what angels weep at! A laugher at a funeral would be a wise man to such a person.

This is so plain a truth, that none of you, I should think, can doubt it. No man, at least no man who ever set foot in a church, can doubt the foolishness and madness of opposing and contradicting God, by either calling or thinking a thing light and harmless and laughable, which he has declared to be a sin, and therefore hateful in his holy all-seeing eyes. But perhaps you may be disposed to ask, "What is the use then of preaching on such a subject? why take the pains of proving what nobody doubts? why warn people against the folly of a sin that nobody is ever guilty of?" My brethren, did I really believe that nobody, or that very few persons were ever guilty of making a mock at sin, assuredly I should not preach against it. But is this quite certain? Is it quite certain that nobody here present has ever made a mock at sin? Alas, if we consider the various ways in which this may be done, I am afraid that, arrant as this folly is, it will turn out to be much commoner than we fancy. I am afraid that, if we were to question our consciences strictly, few of us would have the satisfaction of

finding that they have always been firmly bent, like the prophet, not to sit in the assembly of the mockers.

The various ways in which men make a mock at sin, may be summed up under two heads: by their words, and by their actions. We shew our scorn and contempt of a thing in our words, when we speak carelessly of it, or laugh at it, or turn it into ridicule. We shew it in our actions, when we live in such a manner as proves that we have no value or regard for it. Words may be uttered thoughtlessly and hastily: but let a person manifest his feelings and sentiments in action, above all in a continued and persevering line of action; let him express his opinions and declare his thoughts by his deeds; and he must indeed be speaking from the abundance of the heart. If a servant, a tenant, a subject were to persist in a course of stubborn resistance to the commands of his master, his landlord, or his king, notwithstanding admonition upon admonition, warning upon warning, threat upon threat, could it be said with the least colour of reason that he respected or cared for him,—that he did not treat him with slight? Suppose that, after many repeated acts of disobedience and resistance, the servant or subject were to go to his master or to his king, and to tell him in a long speech, how much he feared him, how entirely he was devoted to him, while he meant in his heart all the while to go on disobeying and resisting him, exactly as he had done before,—would not such conduct be adding a new and grosser insult to all the former ones? Would it not be a downright mockery? even as it was a mockery in the soldiers, when they crowned Christ, and called him king, and bowed the knee before him, and then rose up and smote him, and spat on him. This then would be the chief count in my indictment against the main part of those who call themselves Christians,—that they call Jesus Lord, and yet do not the things which he would have them do, insult

ing him by their disobedience, while they mock him by their lip-service. Even of the first kind of mockery, the mockery of words, few are wholly innocent. Of the last kind of mockery, the mockery of deeds, all have been more or less guilty.

Under the former head come all those grosser offences against piety, and even against common decency, those scoffs at the word and at the laws of God, the mad babble of the unbeliever, and the obscene ribaldry of the libertine, the mire in which the swine walloweth, and the vomit to which the dog returneth. These barefaced mocks at sin,—let me rather call them mocks at God,—are still however by God's blessing rare amongst us, at least in country parishes: and wherever the lessons of christian education are duly extended to the body of the people, wherever the Gospel is duly preached and taught, as Christ ordained it should be, to the poor,—there by God's blessing they shall still continue rare. But there are a number of other offences, less glaring indeed than those I have just spoken of, which come under the same head of mocks at sin, and which, I am afraid, are by no means uncommon: though they too are ruinous to all purity of heart, and to all holiness of life. Such are all irreverent applications of scripture phrases, all idle jokes on the mysteries, the ceremonies, and the ordinances of religion, wherein many, especially among the young, are too fond of indulging, thus destroying that reverence for the things of God, which it behoves all to feel. To the same class belong the songs of the drunkard, and all that foolish talking and jesting, which St. Paul forbids as not convenient, that is to say, as ill-suited to the character of a Christian, and at variance with that spotlessness of thought and word which our Lord requires from his people.

These things, common though they be, every one knows and feels to be wrong; they are so evidently mocks at sin,

nobody has a word to say in excuse of them. Yet when any of us employ any of those little mincing phrases, under which people are so fond of disguising broad and open crimes, when we use any of those gentler names for sins, which the world has cunningly substituted for the plainness of christian language,—are not we ourselves guilty of something like the same offence? Are not we, by a weak compliance with a mischievous and unholy custom, speaking lightly of the sins which God has heavily condemned, when we speak of them by a light name? This is a matter which people ought to consider more seriously than they do, seeing that names go so far in governing the world. If a lie were always called a lie, and nothing else,—if a theft were always called a theft, and nothing else,—if whoredom and adultery were always called whoredom and adultery, and nothing else, — we should have much fewer liars, fewer thieves, fewer whores and adulteresses, than are now seen walking about, lifting up their heads without shame in the light of the sun. For in that case the sin would be ever set before us in its naked hideousness and horror; and the imagination and the conscience would start from a sight so frightful and revolting. But wrap up the same crime in a soft unmeaning phrase, so that the ear shall not be shocked, nor the conscience scared, call a lie a story or a fib, call the sin of whoredom a slip,—and they who are tempted too readily fancy there can be no great harm in that of which the world speaks so mildly and indulgently. That the wretches, whether of high or low degree, who wish to further Satan's work on earth, and to decoy new victims to his net, —that they, who are the devil's agents, should employ the devil's craft,—is not surprising. But that the great majority of the world, who have no desire to lead their fellow-creatures into evil, who have no wish to set up the empire of sin, who would rather see men honest and sincere and

chaste and sober, than the contrary,—that we should fall as almost all have done, into this most mischievous practice of miscalling sins, is indeed a matter of wonder and regret. And yet who can say that he has always spoken of sins, as sins ought to be spoken of? Who can say that he has never used any of those gentle, delicate phrases, by which some of the blackest crimes are frittered down into failings, into errors, into pardonable weaknesses, which it is harsh to censure too severely? It is idle to plead, that the thing remains the same, whatever name you call it by. The softer name does not grate on the ear, does not alarm the soul, and frighten it off the forbidden ground. Call the sin by its true name; and we see and feel that it is a thing hateful to man, and condemned by the law of God. Indeed this is the very reason why people blink the true name: they are loth to speak too much evil of it. Mealy-mouthed in this matter alone, they are loth to speak evil of sin. Who on the other hand can say that he has always spoken of piety and holiness, as piety and holiness ought to be spoken of? For here again the world is wont to speak through the devil's trumpet: here again it has a set of misnomers, another set of mocks. While it speaks of the foulest sins by harmless and familiar names, turning stains into spots, and spots into specks, it no sooner catches a glimpse of anything that looks like piety, than it sets up a cry against it, ridiculing it, scoffing at it, magnifying every petty act of self-denial into a piece of pharisaical hypocrisy. And here again even those who profess to be Christians, even those who profess to wish that their neighbours should be good Christians, are too apt to follow the example of the world, to jeer where the world jeers, and to rail where the world rails.

This is one, and all must acknowledge, a very common way, in which the world at present is wont to make a mock at sin. Another and worse form of the same offence, yet, I

fear, a very common one also, is when men, in looking at any wicked conduct, suffer themselves to be dazzled by some of its accompaniments, so as to lose sight of its wickedness, and in speaking of it, instead of expressing a righteous indignation at its sinfulness, will talk with admiration of the agreeable qualities with which the criminal has adorned his crime, or of the talents which he has misapplied to it. Who has not heard the reveller and the libertine, if he happens to be lively and companionable, praised as pleasant and goodhumoured? Who has not heard rogues highly spoken of for their dexterity, and almost applauded when sharpwitted? Who has not witnessed how in the opinion of the world cleverness, or courage, covers a multitude of sins? Yet, common as such judgments are, surely they stamp the mark of folly on the brow of all who so judge of sin. No one thinks of praising a poison for being either sweet or strong. No one takes young tigers into his house, and rears them as playmates for his children, because their claws are so sharp, and their gripe so crushing. Yet the same man, who would never think of trusting his child with the sweet or strong poison, who could not sleep in his bed, if he knew that a beast of prey was prowling about his dwelling, will talk in the presence of his family as if there were no harm in wickedness, provided it be pleasant, or clever, or audacious, that is to say, provided it be great and dangerous and attractive, and all but inexcusable. Now how are we to account for this glaring difference between our judgments with regard to physical and moral evil? How comes it, that, if a thing be deadly to the body, we care not for its sweetness, and dread it in proportion to its power, whereas, if a thing be deadly to the soul, we prize it for its attractiveness, and admire it for its power, although both these qualities render it more deadly? The reason is plain: we have a prudent and wholesome dread of bodily

pain and death, and are foolishly careless about what can only hurt and kill the soul. Sin in our eyes is a small matter, so small, that the very qualities which render it more sinful, strip it in our eyes of its offensiveness, and so conceal that offensiveness, that we are ready to embrace and make friends with it. Thus here we have another way in which men are very apt to make light of sin, and to shew their want of clear sightedness, their want of sound judgment, their want of right feeling, in a word, to shew their foolishness in so doing. This is a matter on which it is needful to speak plainly: because it is truly monstrous that, in a christian country, the thing most frequently left out of account in speaking or judging of any action should be its righteousness or sinfulness. Nor would anything that man can do work more powerfully to the encouragement of goodness, and to the discountenancing of irreligion and immorality, than a strict stern habit of calling everything, be it good or be it evil, by its true and christian name.

Thus we have seen that, even in England, and in our days, there are many ways in which people still make a mock at sin in their words, and that such conduct richly deserves the charge of foolishness given to it in the text. But there is also another way of making a mock at sin, in deed. If all pretence and makebelieve be more or less a mockery, then assuredly a long-continued course of such pretences, in which the tongue goes on crying *Yes*, while the heart all the time is muttering *No*, must prove a man to be habitually and insolently regardless of the thing or person that he treats with such solemn contempt. Such, we say, would be the case, if a servant, after disobeying his master, —a tenant, after defrauding his landlord,—a subject, after rebelling against his king,—should go and make dutiful promises without any intention of performing them. Such too, if we are God's subjects and servants,—if we are his

tenants, holding our life and health and all our enjoyments solely under him, and at his will,—such must also be the case with us Christians, whenever we turn our hearts away from God, and yet draw near to him with a thoughtless or hypocritical lip-service. This question may be brought to a speedy issue. We are assembled here in church, to entreat God's pardon for our sins, to acknowledge that we have failed to do what we ought to have done, and have done what we ought not to have done: for all these faults we have entreated to be forgiven, and have besought God to give us his gracious help, that we may lead better lives in future. Now let every person ask himself this simple question: "Did my heart go along with my lips, and with the voice of the minister, when these petitions were repeated? Did I really feel the slightest touch of grief at having made so base and worthless a return to my King and Master for all his manifold loving-kindnesses to me? Was I in any degree sorry for having offended God? Have I at this moment any sort of wish to serve him better in future?" If you have not felt any of these things, you must be well aware that your prayers have been only so much froth, and that your whole service this evening has been no better than a grave mockery. Yet it is probably the only service that many of you render God from one week's end to the other. Is it not too true then, my brethren, that of this sinful mockery, this mockery by deeds, we have all of us been more or less guilty? God grant that we may not be so now, or that, if any are so now, they may never be so again!

But some of you will perhaps say, that you mean to repent and turn to God by-and-by, and so what you do now does not much signify. Unholy and godless as your lives may be now, Christ's merits are sufficient to wash away all sin; and you mean to take advantage of them, when you

have given your passions a run some years longer. And is not this a fresh mock, and perhaps the worst of all? To take advantage of a person usually means to cheat him; and so in fact do they who talk or think in this way, purpose in their hearts to cheat Christ. Because Christ died to deliver us from our sins, that we may live a life of righteousness, therefore do they continue in their sins, and plead the mercy of God as a ground for cleaving to their iniquity. If men really valued that mercy, as they say they do, if they duly estimated the price it cost to purchase their forgiveness, would they dare so abuse it?

But the guilt of such mockery is too plain: let me rather speak of its folly. It is the folly of playing with death. It is the folly of provoking God to cut us off in the midst of our calculating wickedness. We know, he can read our hearts: we know, he can see our purpose to cheat him. What then! do we think we can outwit God? Above all is such conduct folly, because we are disabling our hearts and souls every day more and more for the work of repentance; without which, we know and believe, we can have no part in the promises of the Gospel. For nothing is more certain than that, the longer a man persists in sin, the harder it is to leave it off. His heart is deadened; his conscience is blunted; his soul closes itself by little and little against the impulses of the Holy Spirit. Thus at last it becomes as impossible,—the word is a fearful, but a true one,—it becomes as impossible, naturally speaking, for the hardened sinner to shake off his nature and do well, as for the Ethiopian to change his skin, or for the leopard to change his spots.

Yet be the difficulty of repentance what it may, repent we must: or we shall be found wanting in the day of judgment. I need not tell you by whom we are to be tried. You know,—every one here must know,—that he is to be

tried by Jesus Christ. Yes, that Saviour, whose name, and whose Father's name, the hardened sinner has so often taken in vain,—whose words were read in church, but he would not come, or, if he came, would not listen,—whose body and blood were set before him on the sacramental table, but he refused to be fed with that living bread, and to drink of that blessed cup,—that Saviour, at whose name, at whose words, at whose mercy, at whose love, the hardened sinner has all his life been making mock, will then be his judge. God "will judge the world (says St. Paul, Acts xvii. 31) by that man whom he has ordained," even by his own Son, who in the beginning created man, and afterwards was himself made man, and died for man, and knoweth everything that is in man. Is it a great comfort to have so good a judge? Is it a great comfort to the sincere believer that God should appoint his own Son, the Friend of man, the Advocate of man, to exercise judgment on that great day? Can he feel more confidence in laying bare the weaknesses of his heart to Him who was in all things tempted like as we are? Do we feel certain that he will pity the poor and ignorant, inasmuch as he himself was poor, and chose out his apostles from the poor and ignorant? I grant it; and praised be God for it! Else who could stand before that dreadful judgment-seat, if justice were not to be tempered with mercy? But on the other hand it must needs heighten the fears of every hardened sinner, that our Saviour, his anointed King, gracious to all who will accept his grace, but, to all who will not, terrible, is to come in person, with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment on all the wicked. Then shall they look on him whom they have pierced by their rebellious folly and ingratitude. They shall see him whom they have crucified,—crucified afresh, the apostle says,—by sinning and making mock at sin. O righteous Lord, who can abide thee on that dreadful day! Come to

us mercifully in this world, we beseech thee, that we be not separated from thee in the world to come. For all, my brethren, all who are not united to God here, must never expect to be united to him hereafter. And who are these wretched people, who can never be permitted to dwell with God, or to taste the joys found only in his presence? They are the persons spoken of in the text, the fools who have made a mock at sin, the disobedient, the careless, the impenitent, the sabbath-breaker, the drunkard, the lustful, the covetous, the worldly-minded, the hard-hearted. These persons, with their eyes open, have chosen death instead of life.

If these things are really so, if the end of these foolish mockers is so certain and terrible, let us, my brethren, seek wisdom,—that true wisdom which cometh from above, and which is first pure, then peaceable, full of mercy and gentleness, and of all good works. Happy is the man who findeth this wisdom! whoso findeth her findeth life, and shall obtain the favour of the Lord. For God delights in her, as most agreeable to his nature, as most resembling himself, as his own gift, the offspring of his own perfection, as begetting honour, love, and hearty obedience to his will, as glorifying him the most truly by best promoting the happiness of his creatures. Let us seek this wisdom, and seek it where it is to be found,—in the Bible, the book of wisdom, and of life; more especially in the gospels, in the words of our blessed Saviour, his commands, his promises, his warnings, his entreaties. Parts of the Bible may be difficult to understand: but these are not difficult, except to practice. In truth, were they as easy to perform, as they are to understand, we should no longer have need of praying for the coming of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God would be come already; the earth would be transfigured into heaven. Moreover while you seek for the seeds of

wisdom in the Bible, you must not allow them to lie there. You must pick them up, and try to sow them in your own hearts, weeding your hearts at the same time, by examining them carefully in the light of the Bible, and plucking up everything growing therein, that the Bible condemns. But neither will the seeds we sow grow up, nor shall we be able to root up the weeds, unless God blesses our labours: and his blessing can only be obtained by diligent and fervent prayer. Therefore we must follow the command of St. James, who tells us that, if we lack wisdom, we must ask it of God, who giveth liberally. All who lack wisdom must ask it of God; that is, all men who have ever lived: for all lack it. No one had ever enough of it: no one has enough of it to learn its value, but wishes earnestly for more.

What remains then my brethren, seeing that we all lack wisdom, but that we all unite in praying for it to Him who alone can give it, to God, the Eternal Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?

O Lord, who hast taught us by thy holy apostle, St. James, to pray to thee for wise and understanding hearts, we kneel before thee in humble trust that, what thou hast commanded us to ask for, thou wilt grant us out of the treasury of thy mercies. Therefore, O Everlasting Wisdom, the Maker, Redeemer, and Governor of all things, let some comfortable beams from the great body of thy heavenly light descend upon us, to enlighten our dark minds, to quicken our dead hearts, to kindle them with the love of thee, and to guide our steps along the path of thy laws through the gloomy shades of this world, to that region of eternal light and bliss, where thou, most blessed Jesus, the Wisdom of God, and the Power of God, reignest with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, in glory, and majesty, world without end.

XIX.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE xvi. 8, 9.

And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

THESE words are from the parable of the unjust steward: and there are two points in them by which, owing to a want of clearness in the translation, many persons have been a good deal puzzled. How comes our Lord Jesus, they ask, to commend the dishonest steward? How again comes he to bid us make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness? or, as most readers nowadays are likely to understand the words, to make the mammon of unrighteousness our friend? If these two difficulties are removed, the parable is clear enough; and removed they may be in a very few words.

In the first place it is not our Lord Jesus Christ, who commends the unjust steward, but the steward's own lord and master; for this is the word which we should use nowadays: it is the steward's master, who, being struck by the cleverness he had shewn, commends it: just as people

now might perhaps speak with admiration of the cleverness and skill displayed by a forger, in copying a very difficult bank note, without in the least intending by so doing to justify or excuse his crime. We should all agree in condemning that. All would agree in saying it was a sad pity the man had turned his cleverness to such a bad purpose. Still a person may do a bad thing in a sharp, handy manner; and we might praise the manner of doing it, while we utterly reprobated the thing itself. Just so it is with the steward's master in the parable. He can never have meant to praise his servant for defrauding him of his rents: but he was struck with the cleverness of the rogue's contrivance; and that he commended.

As to the other difficulty, it arises altogether from a change in the meaning of the little word *of;* which our forefathers often used, where we should now say *by*. Thus in the Bible we often find such expressions as "taught *of* God," "warned *of* God." Here however, though in these days we should say, "taught *by* God," "warned *by* God," still, as the words cannot mean anything else, there is no uncertainty. But there are many passages in which it is otherwise, and we may easily fall into mistakes. For instance, when we read in the 1st chapter of St. Matthew, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken *of* the Lord by the prophet,"—at first thought we should all take these words to mean "what was spoken *concerning* the Lord by the prophet;" whereas their real meaning is, that "all this was done to the end that what was spoken *by* the Lord through the mouth of his prophet might be fulfilled." I have said thus much about this little word, because I believe very few persons read the New Testament, who do not stumble at my text; and numbers, even among those who have had what is called a good education, turn away from it in sad perplexity, unable to

conceive how Jesus Christ could command them to make the mammon of unrighteousness their friend. And assuredly he does not so command them. What he bids us do, is to make friends *by*, or by the help of, the mammon of unrighteousness: that is, to employ the mammon of unrighteousness,—mark the words,—to employ that mammon, that riches, which is called unrighteous, because by so many it is gained dishonestly, and spent wickedly,—to employ that riches, which so many employ amiss to their soul's hurt, in making friends for ourselves, who shall receive us into everlasting habitations. In other words, our blessed Lord commands us to make such a use of our money, and of all our other talents, be they what they may, for the glory of God and the good of our brethren, that after our death it may please our God and father to receive us into the heavenly abodes of never-ending peace and joy.

The parable having thus been cleared of its main difficulties, its general purport may be stated as follows. There was a rich landholder, who entrusted the management of a large estate to his steward. After a time charges were brought against the steward of wasting and injuring the property. So his master sent for him, told him he should turn him off, and bade him bring in his accounts. On hearing this the steward was in despair: he knew he should never get another place, after being sent away in such a manner: and he had saved no money to live upon. "I cannot dig," he said to himself; "I am ashamed to turn beggar. What shall I do?" At last he hit on a device, to gain the goodwill of his master's tenants, so that, when he had lost his home, they might be ready to befriend him. He sent for them; and to the first that came he said, "How much does your rent amount to this year?" To understand this question, and the answer to it, you must bear in mind that it was not the custom in those days for

the tenant to pay his landlord a fixed sum of money by way of rent. In those countries the land used to be let, and, I believe, still is let on entirely different terms. The tenants are mostly poor men. They have no money to stock their farms, and to manage them on their own account. So the landlord supplies the stock, the seed, the tools, and whatever else is wanted for the cultivation of the farm: the tenant, or husbandman, finds the labour: and they divide the produce, whatever it may be, between them. The tenant keeps a certain portion, generally half, to himself, and pays over the remainder to his landlord. It is not hard to see what abuses and what dishonesty this mode of taking land opens a way to. The steward in the parable takes advantage of it, to make friends with the tenants at his master's cost. He asks the first farmer who comes to him, "How much is your rent this year?" And the man says to him, "A hundred measures of oil. My olives have turned out very well this year, and have given a good quantity of oil; and my landlord's share comes to a hundred measures." "What," said the steward again to him; "a hundred measures of oil from such a small oliveyard as yours? I am sure my master will be quite satisfied if you pay him half that. So take your bill, and write fifty." Having thus made a friend of the man who farmed the oliveyard, the steward repeated the same piece of roguery with a tenant who rented some corn-land. He, it seems, owed his landlord a hundred measures of wheat. But the steward again said, "It is too much for you to pay," and bade him take his bill, and set down fourscore. By some accident the steward's trick came to the master's ears; who was struck with his cleverness, and though he had been a sufferer by it, commended him for it,—commended him, not for the roguery, but for the forethought and ingenuity it shewed.

With this commendation the parable ends. What follows is our Lord's remark on the story, and the moral he would have us draw from it. "In this story (he says) you see an example, how the children of this world are mostly wiser in their generation than the children of light. In this wisdom I would have you follow them. I would have you too endeavour to make friends to yourselves,—not such friends as the unjust steward made; for he made only earthly friends,—nor by the same dishonest practices; for that would be against the law of God and man: but I would have you no less anxious to make friends, no less careful, no less forecasting than he was. Only let your friends be heavenly friends, who will receive you into everlasting habitations. Do you wish to know how such friends are to be gained? They are to be gained by the help of the mammon of unrighteousness, by making the most of all your earthly means and opportunities of serving God and helping your neighbour."

It is impossible to read this parable, and our Lord's remark on it, without being struck by the broad assertion that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. The children of light are those who have been called to a knowledge of the Gospel, and who have given ear to that call, at least in some measure. They believe in Jesus Christ: at least they profess to believe in him. They come to church, and listen decently to what is read and taught there. Sometimes too they pray, or at least say their prayers, at home. They read a chapter in the Bible now and then. In one way or other they have learnt enough about religion to know the kind of life which, as Christians, they ought to lead,—that they ought to be holy, kind, humble, self-denying. Nay, they have even a wish to lead such a life. Thus much at least is needed to make what our Lord in the text calls a child of light. The

child of this world, on the other hand, is one who, like Gallio, the Roman governor, careth for none of these things. It is not necessary that he should be a professed unbeliever, only he never troubles his head about religion. He may be what the world calls a vicious man, or not; just as his heart happens to be set on what the world calls pleasure, or on what it calls honour, or gain. But whether he leads a vicious, or a decent reputable life, religion has no place in his heart: he lives without God in the world. Now of these two men, our Lord says, the child of this world is wiser in his generation, mind; that is, wiser in his own line. Jesus does not say that he is wiser altogether: for that he is not. The folly of making a wrong choice,—the folly of hungering after that which is not bread, and setting his heart on things which cannot satisfy,—the folly of turning his back on his heavenly Father, of living in careless defiance or neglect of the Almighty Ruler of the world,—the folly of choosing to walk earnestly and busily in a path which leads to death and hell,—with all this heap of follies the child of this world is justly chargeable: and it is such a pitch of foolishness as must entitle him to the first and foremost place in folly. He is the fool of fools; because he chooses his course of life wrongly: whereas the child of light chooses, or at least professes to choose, his course of life rightly and wisely.

But after the choice has been made, a wonderful change takes place. He who chose his path like a fool, walks along it like a wise man; he who chose his like a wise man, walks along it like a fool. "The children of this world," says Jesus, "in their generation, are wiser than the children of light." How does this happen? you will naturally ask. How comes the fool to act so much more wisely than the wise man? and the wise man so much less wisely than the fool? My friends, there

can be no doubt, the ground and cause of all this lies in that evil bias of our nature, which, unless the Spirit of God be within us to outweigh and check it, makes it so much easier for us to do wrong than to do right. At all events the fact is certain. The children of this world do, in their own line, and according to their own notions, act much more wisely than the children of light. It is impossible to walk through life with one's eyes open, and not perceive that this is so. The true child of this world is thorough-going, active, persevering. When he has made up his mind that this or that thing is desirable, he sets his heart upon having it. He casts about and considers, until he has hit on a plan of getting it: and as soon as he is satisfied that his plan is a good one, he straightway begins carrying it into effect. It matters little whether the object of his wishes be great or small, whether it be an estate, or a horse; if the child of this world wants to buy it, he takes the proper steps for doing so, and loses no time. He does not say, "That horse would just suit me: I never saw one I liked half so much: so the next time I come this way, some six months hence, I will ask the price of it." He is too wise for that: he knows that six months hence the horse may no longer be on sale: he bethinks himself that no time is like the present; and if he finds that the horse is to be had for a fair price, he closes the bargain at once. It is the same whatever he engages in. If he is a man of business, he gives his mind to his business: he takes more delight in thinking about it, than about anything else. No subject interests him so much. Any firstrate book that treats of it, he would be sure to study; and probably would have its chief rules and directions at his fingers' ends, ready to be applied on all occasions. If he cannot learn from books, he takes care to learn from men. He wastes no opportunity of talking about his business with persons of

great experience in it. He is glad to hear what they may have to say upon it: any practical hints or remarks which they may drop, he stores up and treasures for future use. In a word, he lives in his business, and for his business, and has very few cares or thoughts out of it. Such is the child of this world, if he happens to be a man of business: and assuredly he may well be called wise in his generation. For he has the wisdom to act up to his own notions. He places his happiness in his business; and thither he goes to seek it. He thinks success in his worldly calling the best thing that can happen to him: and that success he does everything man can do to ensure, by diligence, by thought, by care, by painstaking, and very often by denying himself many pleasures and comforts. In a word, Mammon is the god he has chosen for himself: and he serves his god, as a god ought to be served, with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. He is wise therefore in his way.

Or suppose that, instead of a man of business, the child of this world happens to be a man of pleasure,—will he still be wise in his generation? Yes, he will still be wise. He will not indeed shew his wisdom in the same way as the man of business: because the road of pleasure is different from the road of business. But in his own way, and on his own road, he will shew his wisdom just as much. He will seek pleasure and amusement with the same eagerness, with the same activity, with the same perseverance, with which the other seeks gain and profit. The true pleasure-hunter, who makes that his object in life, will follow after it early and late. Who so regular as he at the beershop, if he is poor, or at the tavern and gaming-house, if he is rich? He is sure to be seen at every place of amusement, at every merrymaking, every feast and fair, that he can contrive to find his way to. He is fond of keeping company with per-

sons of his own sort. When he is with them, what delight does he take in telling over his own adventures to them, and in hearing theirs! His head is full of lewd stories and foolish songs. Thus he too is wise in his generation. For he makes his belief, his words, and his deeds tally. He has placed his happiness in pleasure; and pleasure he thinks of, pleasure he talks of, pleasure he follows after from year's end to year's end. Everybody who knows him must see that pleasure is the great end of his life. To pleasure he gives himself up. He has chosen Belial, the god of lewdness and debauchery, for his god: and Belial he serves, as the other served Mammon, with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.

This then is the wisdom of the children of this world, that what they do they do thoroughly,—that what they profess to think desirable, they strive in earnest to obtain,—that they do not allow a little thing to stop them, or lure them aside, when pursuing the object of their wishes,—that they worship their false gods with a true and zealous worship.

Turn your eyes now to the children of light, and tell me whether you can see the like marks of wisdom in them. We profess to make heaven the object of our lives: are we really and earnestly following after it? Are we as active, as zealous, as steady and persevering, in seeking after our heavenly inheritance, as the children of this world are in seeking after gain and pleasure? Are we as much, or half as much, in earnest? Do we never say, six months hence will be time enough to think seriously, and to repent and turn to God? Do we take delight in the best book that was ever written, and keep its rules at our fingers' ends, in order to square our behaviour by them? Are we anxious to seek the company, and listen to the discourse, of such as honour God and keep his commandments? Do we examine

ourselves regularly, as a merchant examines his accounts? Do we, on perceiving a fault in our christian life, set about thinking how we may best avoid it for the future, and then, having laid down our plan, carry it immediately and steadily into practice? Do we rejoice as much in the Lord's day, as the man of business rejoices in his day of sale, and the man of pleasure in his day of amusement? Or do you not often love your Sunday rather as a day of worldly rest,—which, blessed be God! he has made it,—than as the day set apart for coming to God, and communing with him in his holy temple? Alas! too sure and certain is it, that we do none of these things. We serve our God, the great Maker and Ruler of the world, with less zeal, with less affection, with less heartiness, with less truth, than the man of business his Mammon, or the man of pleasure his Belial.

This is the great fault and frailty of our christian life. We do our work by halves? Is this wise? is it reasonable? is it not the height of madness? to be so sluggish, so indolent, so listless, so false-hearted, in the service of the God who made us, and of the Saviour whom we declare to have redeemed us,—in the pursuit of the joys of heaven, which we declare to be the only true joys, and which are to last for ever? If you did not believe the Gospel, if you did not profess to be Christians, I might then say you were wise in your generation; I might then exhort you to go on in your present course. But seeing that you do believe in Christ, seeing that you do hope and wish for heaven, take a lesson from the enemy, learn the wisdom of the serpent. Let us imitate the zeal, the perseverance, the prudence, the courage, the unweariableness, in a word, the wisdom, which the children of this world shew in the pursuit of their vain and perishable, of their ruinous and deadly objects. Let us be as active and as determined to please God, as they are to please themselves. Then, on that great day, when all the

shows of this world shall have passed away, and every man's work shall be made manifest,—while their wisdom turns out to be the excess of folly, and their labour to have been vanity and vexation,—while, in return for the wind which they have been sowing so diligently, they are reaping the whirlwind of wrath,—the God, who for his Son's sake will vouchsafe to accept our services, and to look with favour on our imperfect attempts to employ the mammon of unrighteousness in his service, will receive us into everlasting habitations.

XX.

THE EVIL EYE.

MATTHEW xx. 15.

Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

SUCH was the question which the householder in the parable put to the labourers when they murmured against him for having been bountiful to their fellow-labourers, while he was only just to them. You probably remember that this householder had gone out early in the morning, and hired men to work in his vineyard for a penny a-day. But the men he hired at first were not enough: so he went out at different times during the day to get more hands. All who would engage with him he hired, but without any fixed agreement, merely promising generally to pay them what was fair and just. In the evening, when work was over, he told his steward to pay the men, and though some of them had worked only one hour, to give them all a whole day's wages. Each was to have his penny. Whereupon those who had been in the vineyard all the day, instead of rejoicing at the good fortune of their fellows, thought themselves hardly treated, because they had only received their due. "They murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, who have borne the

burthen and heat of the day." "So I have," said the master of the vineyard to one of these murmurers: "I have paid you alike: but you have received your just due: you have been paid the sum you agreed for; take that thine is, and go thy way. May not I do as I like with my own money? If I choose to make these other men a present of a day's wages, what hurt or what wrong is that to thee? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" These last words I have chosen for my text; and it is about them that I am going to preach to you to-day. In other words, I intend my sermon to be on that very evil thing, an evil eye.

Some perhaps may here ask, what is meant by an evil eye? I answer, that in different places of Scripture different things may be meant by it. But what is meant in the text is clear enough. The evil eye meant here is such an eye as the labourers in the vineyard had, when they looked askance at their neighbour's good fortune. An evil eye therefore is a grudging eye. To say of any one in this sense that he has an evil eye, is the same as saying that he is of a grudging turn of mind. Now this evil eye, this grudging turn of mind, is far commoner than it ought to be. We have still too often cause to ask the question in the text, Is thine eye evil? Neither is the evil confined to persons of any one class. High and low, rich and poor, young and old, each may have an evil eye. For examples of this in old times we have only to search our Bibles: where we find that not even the greatest and most powerful persons, not even those to whom God has given the most, are safe from this dangerous malady. When Ahab, the king of Israel, in the midst of his possessions, grudged Naboth his vineyard, and wanted to take it from him, was not this an evil eye? Again, did not it shew an evil eye in Haman (who was the favourite of king Ahasuerus), to call his friends together, and, after telling them of his riches and power, to say to them, "Yet all

this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate, who will not bow to me nor do me reverence." Surely Ahab might have been satisfied with the riches of Samaria. But no: his evil eye grudged Naboth a poor vineyard; and so, though he was king of Israel, he went to his royal palace, heavy and displeased, and laid himself down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would not eat. So might Haman have been satisfied with the reverence paid him by all the princes of Persia. But no: his evil eye stung his heart, because one single Jew would not do him homage.

Such is the form which the malady of an evil eye takes in the great of this world. It quite destroys their relish for the thousand earthly goods they have, because of some paltry trifle which they have not. How general a malady must this be then, when even the highest are not safe from it! How bad and painful, what a blighter of happiness must it be, when it can thus turn the most prosperous lot into bitterness! Above all, how dangerous must it be, when it could lead to such wickedness as the murder of Naboth, and Haman's plot for destroying all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus!

But let us come down a few steps in the ladder of life, and look at the middle classes of society: shall we find the evil eye among them? Among them too, I grieve to say, we often find the evil eye,—not indeed shewing itself in murders, and in plots for a general massacre: such bad things, God be praised! are so entirely out of our power, that we do not feel so much as tempted to them. In these days the evil eye does not shew itself in these horrible ways: but it does shew itself in a thousand ugly shapes, and under every one of them breeds misery and mischief. What are all those jealousies and rivalries, which are for ever dividing neighbour from neighbour, friend from friend, and some-

times even brother from brother, and sister from sister,—what are these but the fruits of an evil eye? Here you may see a man repining because he is not noticed by the great man of the country, while another is. There a man is vexing himself because his neighbour is more popular, or enjoys more influence, or has more skill and activity and enterprise. In a third place is a family divided against itself, because some one member of it happens to be a greater favourite at home or abroad than the others. Hence that one is envied and hated by those who are nearest to him in blood, just as Joseph was hated by his brethren, because they saw that their father Jacob loved him most of all. Let none say that these little jealousies and rivalries are trifling faults, not worthy to be named in a sermon. If they are trifling faults, then envy, and hatred, and malice, and uncharitableness are trifling faults: for the jealousies and rivalries I have been speaking of are neither more nor less than the envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness of our nature, shewing themselves in little things. True, you will find nothing about such jealousies and rivalries in Scripture. But you will find the same thing under another name. The word which our translators used, to express evil jealousies and rivalries, is emulations. Turn then to the Epistle to the Galatians, and there you will see what St. Paul thinks of emulations, that is, as we should say in modern English, of jealousies and rivalries, such as I have been speaking of. His words are these: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, hatred, variance, emulations." These emulations then are works of the flesh, and that manifestly. In other words, they so plainly spring from the corrupt and evil, from the ungodly and selfish principle in man, that there can be no question or dispute about it. Now observe what sort of company the apostle classes emulations with: "The works of the flesh are these;

adultery, fornication, idolatry, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like." (Gal. v. 19-21.) Such, according to St. Paul, is the parentage and lineage of these emulations, of these rivalries and jealousies, which people nowadays think it no great harm to indulge in. The parent of these emulations is the flesh; for they are the works of the flesh. The brethren of emulations are hatred and variance. The children of emulations are wrath and strife in families, seditions in the state, and envyings in the bosom of individuals. That is to say, a spirit of rivalry in families will lead to wrath and strife; a spirit of rivalry in kingdoms will lead to seditions and disturbances. Even when this evil spirit is penned up within a single bosom, it will rankle there and fill it with envy.

Having thus seen the effects of this evil eye, of this jealous grudging cast of mind, first in the highest, and then in the middle ranks, let us consider thirdly how it shows itself among the poor. That they are liable to this hateful disease quite as much as others, is clear from the parable whence the text is taken. For who were the people that murmured against the owner of the vineyard for being generous and bountiful to their fellows, when he had only been just to them? Were they not common labourers, who had been hired to work for the day? Day-labourers, then, and their wives, and their children, may all have an evil eye. But as the parable proves that the labouring poor may have this evil eye, so it likewise teaches us the way in which the evil eye most frequently shews itself in them. In them it generally shews itself in a grudging temper, which grumbles and teases itself, because some good has been done to a neighbour, which all do not share alike. Now this is truly the evil eye,—a disorder which, I fear, is quite as common among the poor of England now, as it can have been among

the labourers of Judea eighteen hundred years ago. The disorder then being so common among all ranks, can we do better than consider how very evil an evil and grudging eye must be?

And first among the evils of an evil eye I will put its glaring folly. If a man got any good by grieving at his neighbour's better fortune, there might be some excuse, or at least some worldly wisdom in doing so. But torment and vex yourselves ever so much, you will not be a farthing the richer. If you cried at your neighbour's good luck from morning till night, you could not cry a halfpenny into your pocket. What folly then, because you are not so fortunate as you want to be, to make yourselves less happy than you need be!

But further, consider the unreasonableness of this grudging evil eye. May not a rich man be bountiful to a few, without being bountiful to all? Even if he did not choose to be bountiful to any one, he would not be answerable to you. To his God, who, after entrusting him with a store of good things, has commanded him by his apostle to give, and to distribute,—to God the niggardly rich man is indeed accountable: and heavy will his reckoning be. But to man he is not accountable: as far as man is concerned, he has a right to hoard if he will. Now if the rich man has a right, so far as this world is concerned, to give to none,—much more has he a right to give only to a few, and to choose who those few shall be. Suppose you had a penny loaf in your pocket, and met four hungry men. You might, if you pleased, divide the loaf among the four. But you might also choose to give it all to one. You might think within yourself, this little loaf will be nothing among four: but it may stay the hunger of one. Would not you have a full right to give your loaf all to one? and would not you have a further right to choose which of the four you would

give it to? One might be older than the others; and perhaps you might like to give it to him. Or one might have a child at home; and you might say to yourself, "That man must be more in want of it because he has a child to provide for; I will give it all to him." Would not you have a right to do so? If any one questioned you about what you had done, would you not think it enough to say, "The loaf was mine, and I gave it as I thought proper? Is not it lawful to do as I will with my own?" Now what is true of this loaf, and these four men, is true more or less of all bounty. So long as a man gives a due portion of his worldly goods to the poor and needy, he has a right to use his own judgment as to the kinds of distress he will relieve; and it is most unreasonable in those who are passed over, to complain because they are not relieved also. If I had a sum of money to give away, and chose to set it apart for the sick, would the healthy have any ground to grumble? Or if I chose to set it apart for the old, would the young have any cause to complain? Nay, suppose that one sick person happened to be passed over when all the other sick were relieved, or that one old person was passed over, when all the others received something, people might wonder at the exception; but none would have a right to complain. The money being mine, I have a right, humanly speaking, to bestow it as I think best.

This brings me to the injustice of an evil eye. Nothing can be more unjust than the complaints one hears from the discontented poor in every corner of the land. One cannot go east, or west, or north, without hearing people murmuring,—"It is very hard I should be left out of such a charity; I have quite as much right to it as neighbour such a one." The answer to such complaints is very simple: True, you have the same right as your neighbour: and that is none at all. Alms are gifts; and a man can have no right to a gift.

To your wages, to what you earn, you have a right: just as the labourers in the vineyard had a right to their penny. But they had no right to more: and when they grumbled, because the landlord, after paying them their penny, did not give them something over, they were rebuked for their envious covetousness and warned against an evil eye. Can anything then be more unjust, than being angry with a man, because his bounty does not reach to you? Nothing, I was going to say; but on second thought there is one thing more unjust: the finding fault with your neighbour, because he has been more fortunate and more favoured than you. Yet how many do this! How many are bitter against their neighbours, and look on them with an evil eye, because the overflowings of a rich man's bounty happen to run toward them! The likelihood is, that they are in some way or other more deserving, either as being more in want, or better behaved: for the worst are always the chief grumblers. But even if they are not more deserving, still the question in the parable returns: May I not do what I will with my own? May I not give to this family if I please, without giving to you also?

All however that I have said hitherto against an evil eye,—its folly, its unreasonableness, and its injustice,—all this is a mere nothing compared with its unchristian wickedness. We Christians have a Master to obey. He has given us a law; and we should follow it. He offers us his Spirit: and we should seek it. Now the great principle of the christian law, the prime fruit of the christian spirit, is love. This spirit you must have; and its fruits you must have; else you are none of Christ's. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Rom. viii. 9.) But how can you flatter yourselves that you have the spirit of Christ, if you have so little love for your neighbour, as not even to rejoice when good befalls him? The Scripture rule is, "Love

your neighbour as yourself." Do you rejoice when good happens to yourself? By that rule you ought to rejoice when good happens to your neighbour. A good man rejoices whenever good is done. If it be done to himself, he thanks God for it: and if it be not done to himself, still he thanks God for it; because somebody at all events is better off, somebody is less wretched, less hungry, less naked, less comfortless to-day than yesterday. Is not this a reasonable, an amiable, a christian motive for rejoicing? Is not it on the other hand an unreasonable and hateful, and even devilish motive for repining? God at the beginning made all things good: and the nearer they are brought back to that original good, the more the children of God rejoice. On the other hand the devil brought evil into the world: he brought upon earth the evil of sin, out of which all other ills take their rise. Just then as it belongs to the sons of God to rejoice that good is done, so it belongs to the children of the Evil One to grieve when good is done. Choose ye then, whose children ye will be,—the children of God, or the children of the Evil One. If you would be the children of God, pray to him to give you a good eye. If you would be the children of the Evil One, go on indulging an evil eye. But remember, you cannot be a mixture between the two. You cannot have an evil eye, and be God's children: God's children must have a good eye.

Some however may perhaps tell me, "It is so hard to be contented; above all, under poverty and distress." I believe it: and therefore I will conclude by pointing out a way in which you may all be discontented without offence. If you must be discontented, let it be at your lack of godliness. There is no treasure half so precious, none half so lasting; there is none, above all, whereof an evil-eyed and discontented person stands half so much in need. So, if you must be covetous, let it be according to the covetousness which

St. Paul recommends. Covet earnestly the best gifts, especially the excellent gift of christian charity, which will enable you to look on your neighbour as a part and portion of yourself. This is the crown and perfection of the christian spirit: and there is no attaining to it, except by conquering and killing self. *Self*, remember, was the worst seed in Adam's apple. Toward God it is self-will, which is rebellion: toward man it is self-love, which is hard-heartedness. It was to root out this evil self from us, and to put in love in its room, that Christ died, and the Holy Ghost comes. Let not that death and that coming be in vain for you. But covet, since you must covet, with a godly covetousness; and cease not to complain, cease not to cry out, weary the ears of God with prayer, until he frees you from all selfishness, and from that worst mark of it, a grudging and evil eye.

XXI.

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE;

OR,

THE CHRISTIAN ON HIS TRIAL.

ACTS xxiv. 16.

Herein I do exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

THESE words were spoken by St. Paul, when he was standing before Felix, the Roman governor, to answer the charges brought against him by the Jews. Seldom has there been a struggle, which to human eyes must have seemed more unequal, than that which took place on that day before the tribunal of Felix. On the one side were ranged the whole nation of the Jews, represented by their high priest and elders, thirsting for the blood of one man, and bringing charge after charge against him, by the mouth of a practised counsellor, who had doubtless been trained in pleading causes, and was skilled in all the niceties of the law. Such was the force arrayed against Paul,—a whole nation, all his countrymen, coming forward in the persons of the rulers of their church, and with a counsellor able to turn the balance of the law to his prejudice. And what was on Paul's side? So far as men's eyes could see, only Paul himself. To all appearance he stood alone, without a lawyer to plead for

him, without a friend of any kind to take his part, or even to cheer him with a look betokening interest in his behalf. But was this really the case? was Paul indeed alone? No: he was enabled to say as his Master had said before him, "I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me." (John viii. 16.) The Father was indeed with him. Could the eyes of the people present have been opened to see the things of the unseen world, how different would the trial have appeared to them! It still would have been most unequal: but the first would have become last, and the last would have become first. They would have seen at once that the host of accusers had no chance of carrying their point against the apostle. They would have seen that all the superiority, all the strength, all the certainty of success lay on the side of the one poor prisoner Paul. For they would have seen that, poor and friendless as he was to outward show, he had God and the Spirit of God with him. With these to aid him, what has anybody to fear? How can he fear man, whose breath is in his nostrils, when his help is in the living God?

But some of you may perhaps say, "Be it so: let the advantage have been on the side of the Jews, or on St. Paul's side; how does this concern us? what practical lesson are we to draw from it?" My friends, it concerns us very nearly; and we may draw a very wholesome lesson from it, if we only make allowance for the difference of circumstances between our days and St. Paul's. We are none of us, God be praised! likely to be brought to trial before a heathen governor for believing in Jesus Christ. This was Paul's trial. It was the trial of many holy men besides in those days of fierce persecution, when almost all the rule and authority of this world was in the hands of idolaters. But it is not likely to be our trial: because the kingdoms of this world have since become, at least in name,

the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ. But though we have not the same kind of trial that Paul had, are not Christians even in these times tried in divers ways? For instance, are we not all on our trial before a world which has no higher law, nor more certain judgment, no purer righteousness, than that of heathen morality? and are there not many ever ready to start up and accuse the faithful servant of Christ? Is he not liable to be laughed at for doing and saying what he believes and knows to be his duty? Is he not liable to fall into the company of such as care not for Christ, and will mock and scoff at those who do? Is he not liable to be exclaimed against as over-precise and foolishly scrupulous, for doing what he knows he ought to do, and for not doing what he knows he ought not to do? These then are among his trials. When any of these trials happens to any of us, we shall do well to think of Paul standing alone before Felix, and to endeavour to act as wisely, as bravely, as much like a true Christian as he did. The strength, the power, the numbers of this world may indeed seem to be against us; we may be two or three against a swarm: but if we are standing up in behalf of any the least of Christ's commandments, the real strength, the real power, the superiority of every sort will be on our side. For remember, God is not dead: he is not changed: he is the living and eternal God, the same to-day that he was yesterday, the same two thousand years hence, that he was two thousand years ago. If he watched over his servant Paul, when brought into jeopardy for the sake of Christ, in like manner will he watch over you, if you are at any time brought into jeopardy for the sake of Christ. I do not say that you will escape from the contest without a wound. Christ's soldiers must expect to be wounded: they must expect in days of persecution to have their human bodies wounded: they must expect to have their earthly

feelings wounded in days of irreligious mockers. Christ's soldiers may be wounded, and will be wounded. This is the way that God takes to exercise our patience, and to mortify and kill the proud flesh, which naturally grows up around the heart. But though Christ's soldiers may be wounded, they cannot be slain; for they that believe in Christ, and love him, and serve him faithfully, even though they die, yet shall they live. As to being conquered, how can they be conquered, when God has promised them the victory for the sake of his beloved Son?

In order however that, when we are brought to trial in any way before the world, on account of our christian faith or practice, we may be enabled to meet our accusers as fearlessly as Paul met his, we must prepare ourselves against such trials, as Paul did, by exercising ourselves to have a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man. The accusation which the Jews brought against Paul by the mouth of their spokesman, Tertullus, may be divided into three charges. In the first place they charged him with being a "mover of sedition," or a disturber of the public peace, "among all the Jews throughout the world." Their next charge was, that he "was a ringleader of the sect of Nazarenes," in other words, one of the chief preachers of the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. Lastly, they charged him with having gone about to profane the temple. Now what answer does Paul give to these three charges? To the first charge, that he was a stirrer of sedition among the Jews, he answers, that after an absence of many years, he had come a few days before to Jerusalem to bring alms and offerings to his countrymen; and that, during his stay there, he had never been found haranguing or exciting the people, either in the temple, or in any of the synagogues, or in any other part of the city. The second charge, that he was a ringleader of the Nazarenes, he does not deny. For the being

a Nazarene, or a believer in Christ, was not then a crime by the Roman law. On the contrary he confesses that he worships the God of his fathers, according to the way which they chose to call a heresy, believing all the things written in the law and in the prophets, trusting in God, as his accusers themselves did, that there would be a resurrection of the dead. "Meantime (he says), while I am looking forward to this resurrection, I exercise myself, I take all pains and give all diligence, that I may in all things have a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man." As to the third charge, that of having profaned the temple, Paul says, "So far is that charge from the truth, that, on the contrary, I had just been purifying myself in the temple, according to the ordinances of the Mosaic law, quietly, without any crowd or disturbance." He then winds up his defence with this honest and confident appeal to his accusers: "Let them declare if they found any evil doing in me, when I was examined before the council; unless indeed it was an offence to exclaim, that I was called in question touching the resurrection of the dead."

In this way did St. Paul call on his accusers themselves to bear witness to the innocency of his life. He challenges them to bring forward a single unlawful act that he had committed, unless it was unlawful to say that he was accused touching the resurrection of the dead. Thus on the strength of his innocence was he, a single man, enabled to stand his ground against a host of powerful and bloodthirsty accusers. It is in this way that our heavenly Father, even when he does not specially interpose in behalf of his servants, by openly taking their part, and working a miracle to preserve them, still often vouchsafes to assist them. No miracle was wrought to save Paul: the trial went on like any other trial: yet Paul was not condemned. For God had given him a mouth and a wisdom, which his enemies could neither

gainsay nor condemn. His mouth was not the mouth of human eloquence; nor was his wisdom, the studied wisdom of human schools. His wisdom was the wisdom of plain truth: his mouth was the mouth of blameless innocence. These were his weapons: and they were sufficient to defend him, single as he was, against a host of powerful accusers.

Now we too, my brethren, as I said above,—we too, if we are faithful and diligent servants of our Lord and Master, Christ, are on our trial. Every Christian is on his trial before a godless world, just as Paul was before the heathen governor. There are many persons, who neither love religion, nor hate it. Like Gallio, they care for none of these things: they do not trouble their heads about the matter. But they do not like that others should be better than they are. Therefore every story which can throw discredit on the piety, or on the understanding, of a religious neighbour,—every story which sets him in a blamable or laughable point of view,—every such story is sure to be favourably received by them, and to meet with a ready hearing. It is before persons of this worldly, careless, godless spirit, that the servants of Christ are ever standing a severe trial.

Again there are others, who, to judge by their bitter way of speaking, positively dislike, and seem almost to hate such as are in earnest about worshipping and serving God. They are never so happy as when bringing accusations against them, when picking holes in their characters, and holding them up to scorn and reproach. If they can find a fair-seeming plea for taxing one religious person with insincerity, a second with being weak and foolish, a third with absurdity and affectation, a fourth with hastiness ot speech, or sharpness, sourness, or gloominess of temper, they seem quite to rejoice in sitting down to such a rich feast of envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness; and their only anxiety is, to get a number of their neighbours to partake

of it. These bitter framers and spreaders of railing accusations against their more religious brethren may be compared to the Jewish accusers of Paul: while the other class of careless worldly-minded persons, who give ear to those accusations, may be compared to the Roman governors before whom he was tried.

Thus we see, the Christian is on his trial before the world. The bitterly irreligious are his accusers: the indolently, carelessly irreligious, who make up the great bulk of mankind, are his judges. How then is he to defend himself on this trial? He must endeavour to defend himself as Paul did, by the wisdom of truth, and by innocency of life. No other defence will be of avail. Accordingly this is the advice which St. Peter gives to the first Christians. He tells them (1. ii. 15) with well-doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. And again (iii. 16) he exhorts them to have a good conscience,—that is, in St. Paul's words, a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men, —"that whereas they speak evil of you as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed, that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ." And again (ii. 12) he says to them, "Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may, through your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

This is just what St. Paul did. He not only put to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and the malice of wicked and cruel men; but by his diligence, his zeal, the strength of his faith, and the purity of his life, he converted numbers of the Gentiles, founded many churches among them, and led them to glorify God. Even Felix, the Roman governor, was so struck by what he saw and heard, that after the trial was over, he sent for Paul privately, that

he might hear him speak of Christ and his doctrine. And who knows but that we too,—if we exercised ourselves, like St. Paul, to keep a conscience void of offence both toward God and man,—might be the blessed means of awakening some relation, some friend, some neighbour, or even some enemy, to take more thought about God, and to set a higher price on heavenly things, than he has hitherto been wont to do? "Cast your bread upon the waters (says the Preacher); for thou shalt find it after many days." (Eccl. xi. 1.) "Blessed (says the prophet) are they that sow beside all waters." (Isaiah, xxxii. 20.) We are to sow, you see, beside *all* waters. And what are we to sow? We are to sow the good seed. A word in season, for instance,—that is good seed. A kind action, or a mild answer,—that again is good seed. But the best and most fruitful seed of all is the quiet example of a holy and godly life. Sow that seed then beside *all* waters. Whithersoever you go, whatever you do, in your hours of work, in seasons of business, in times of leisure, at home with your families, abroad among strangers, in all your goings, and all your doings, leave behind you the trace of a good example: shew by your life that you believe in Christ; live according to your belief; let people see that herein you exercise yourselves, to have a conscience void of offence, not only toward God, but also toward man, nor only toward man, but also toward God. You must serve them both: you must do your duty to both: you must love both. You must love and serve God for his own sake: you must love and do your duty to man for God's sake;—because God has commanded it,—because you are all children of the same Father,—because you are all bought with the same price—because you are all fellow-servants of the same Saviour.

This is what St. Paul did, when he exercised himself to have a conscience void of offence. Do you suppose that

he is sorry now for having thus exercised himself? Do you suppose that he wishes now he had not exercised himself so much? that he wishes he had not taken so much pains to do his duty? Do you suppose he grudges the labour and self-denial it cost him during his life, to keep himself in all things pure and holy? Even in this world they who sow plenteously reap plenteously; and still more plenteous is their harvest in the next world. St. Paul sowed plenteously: he was in labours more abundant: and so there was laid up for him a crown of glory. Would we receive a crown of glory like his? we must first be like him in his labours. We are not indeed called upon to suffer hunger and thirst and persecution and nakedness, as he did. From all these trials, so hard to the infirmity of our flesh, God has mercifully spared us. Nor are we called to bear the brunt of an accusation from Jews, and of a trial for our lives before heathens. But we too have our trials to bear and to stand: and if we bear them and stand them as he did,—if we abound in faith, in love, in long-suffering, in patience, in all the work of the Lord,—if we are diligent in exercising ourselves as he did, to have a conscience always void of offence both toward God and toward man,—we shall find, when the end comes, that God has not overlooked our endeavours to serve and please him: we shall find, unworthy as we are, that for us also has his goodness laid up a crown of reward.

XXII.

TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

ISAIAH lxi. 3.

Trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord.

EVERY one who reads his Bible, and minds what he reads, must know that it is a very common thing with the sacred writers to compare the growth of religion in man's heart with the growth of trees and plants. To go no farther than that part of the Old Testament which is oftenest read in church,—the Book of Psalms,—hear how David speaks in the 1st Psalm. "Blessed is the man whose delight is in the law of the Lord. He shall be like a tree planted by the water-side, that will bring forth his fruit in due season. His leaf also shall not wither." Again in the 92nd Psalm we read: "The righteous shall flourish like a palm-tree, and shall spread abroad like a cedar in Lebanon. Such as are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of the house of our God. They also shall bring forth more fruit in their age, and shall be fat and well-liking." In the New Testament, I scarce need remind you, both John the Baptist and our Saviour make use of nearly the same image, comparing good men to good trees, and evil men to corrupt or rotten trees.

Now in what are men like trees? In what does the

likeness between the spiritual and the vegetable life lie? For unless there be some such strong and striking likeness, the passages I have quoted are words with little more than a shadow of meaning? Why, in a word, are God's people called in the text, "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord?"

Now you must not fancy, as some may be apt to do, that the sacred writers use images of this kind merely for the sake of ornament, from a fondness for sticking flowers here and there in their pages. These images, if we take them rightly, are so many short parables; they are brought in to rouse our attention, to awaken our fancy, to set us a-thinking, and to fix the truth more deeply in our memories by their sharp and pointed manner of putting it. You know how much more easily children are taught a thing by the help of pictures than by mere naked words. This is just the way God takes to teach his children in the Bible. When he compares the wicked to grass, which to-day is green, and to-morrow is withered,—when he compares the righteous to a flourishing and deep-rooted tree,—he speaks pictures to us.

Here let me point out to you the great advantage which country-people in this respect have over others, toward the understanding of God's word. The images, or as I just now called them, the pictures in the Bible, are almost all taken from country matters. How should a person who has lived all his life in a town, and never seen a sheep sheared, —how should such a person feel the force of that beautiful passage in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, where our Lord's behaviour before Pilate is compared to a sheep in the shearer's hands? Town-people may understand that the sheep is dumb, and that our Saviour was dumb too, notwithstanding all the insults cast upon him. Thus much they certainly may understand, because the prophet says so.

But they cannot have the same strong and lively sense of the whole scene, which they might have gained by seeing a sheep sheared. What is true of sheep-shearing is equally true of the other country occupations and sights so often referred to in the Bible. Images and pictures taken from such things ought to come home with more power to your minds than they can to the minds of town-people. So that, if the Bible be the poor man's book, it is especially the book of those who plough, and reap, and tend flocks,—of those who have watched the growth of plants, and daily see the sun rise and set, and are led to mark the clouds as they journey across the sky. These are the sights in the midst of which you have grown up: and these are the very images which the Bible is wont to use for the sake of giving us a sense of spiritual things. Instead therefore of complaining that you are unlearned, and making your want of knowledge an excuse, as too many do, for not studying their Bible, you should rather say to yourselves, "God, though he has withheld many advantages and opportunities from me, has given me one advantage, and that a great one: he has cast my lot in the country; so that from my childhood upward I have been accustomed to see many of the things which the Bible speaks of the oftenest. Let me make the more use of this advantage, because it is my only one. Let me strive to find out and keep in mind the meaning of the images and pictures in God's book. When I see a flock of sheep, let me think of the good Shepherd. When I see a man ploughing, let me remember the sufferings of my Saviour, how 'the ploughers ploughed upon his back, and made long furrows.' (Psalm cxxix. 3.) In this way let me try to make all I see, and all I do, minister to the understanding of the word of God; praying earnestly to God that he will show me the true spiritual meaning of his pictures, and beseeching him to give me grace, that, the more I

know of his grace, and of his plan for our salvation, the more thankful I may be for it,—the more I know of his law, the more anxious I may be to keep it."

Having thus shown you the purposes intended to be answered by these images and pictures, which the Bible so often uses, I shall go back to the picture set before us in the text: why are God's people called "trees of righteousness?"

In the first place, they are so called for the reason given in the text, because they are "the planting of the Lord." Godliness is not a thing which any craft of man can fashion. A man can no more make himself godly, than he can make a tree, or so much as the seed of a tree. If he becomes so, it must be the work of God. It was the word of God, that in the beginning made "the earth bring forth the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself:" and it is from the seeds of the forest which the earth brought forth in the days when God made heaven and earth,—it is from the seeds of those first and earliest trees, that all other trees have arisen. Some of these have sown themselves, as it were. They have sprung up, and grown, and come to their full stature, without any help from man. Others have been sown by man: and these too have grown up in time to be trees, and have flourished, and been strong and beautiful. So is it with the trees of righteousness. When God gave his blessed word to man, he gave it to be full of seeds. For so it is written: "The seed is the word of God." If this seed be duly sown in the heart,—it matters not by what means,—let it only be sown; and if it neither be choked by thorns, nor burnt up by the heat, nor killed by the frost, the plant thus sown, if God watches over it and prospers it, will grow up to be a tree of righteousness.

It matters not, I say, by what means the word is sown. The means are manifold: for the Lord worketh diversely.

Sometimes the seed is sown in early childhood by godly parents: and happy is it for those children in whom the seed is thus sown. Sometimes it is self-sown, as it were, while we are reading or listening to the Scriptures. Sometimes it is sown by what may justly be called an act of more special providence: as when a passage in a book, taken up perhaps for amusement, finds its way to our heart, and drops some good seed into it. But oftener it is sown by the voice of the preacher, or by the counsel of some true friend. Here is a great variety of methods, by every one of which, there can be no doubt, the seeds of divine truth have been planted over and over again, and to such good purpose as to grow up into trees of righteousness.

But some may ask,—if the seed can be sown by godly parents, and by christian ministers, how can it be said of such trees, that they are the Lord's planting? I answer in the words of St. Paul: "I have planted; Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth; but God, that giveth the increase." (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.) In every case the trees of righteousness must be of God's planting. But God is pleased, as we have seen, to plant in divers ways,—sometimes by an act of special providence to awaken us to a sense of his ever-watchful power,—at other times, and more frequently, by the preaching and teaching of the ministers whom he has set to take care of his people. Nevertheless, even though it were Paul himself that planted, the work would still be God's: to whom alone be therefore ascribed the glory of our merciful planting into life. Even when God is pleased to honour his servants, by making them his instruments in planting, they can only at the utmost sow seeds, the growth of which must be from God.

Growth then is a second point of likeness between trees and godliness; which makes it proper to call the righteous

"trees of righteousness." Without the sun and air and rain, where would be the growth of the tree? Without the light and the purifying breath and the dew of God's Holy Spirit, where would be the growth of the Christian? In this point above all does man feel his utter weakness. He can plant indeed after a fashion, or try to plant: he can put the seed into the ground and into the mind: he can bind line upon line, and precept upon precept: but can he make the seed grow? Will the line of duty keep a man straight? will the precept curb even his outward conduct? much more, will it tame and govern his heart? Alas! these are things far beyond the power of human teaching. It is God, and God alone, who giveth the growth and increase.

But if this be so, if the growth and increase be thus entirely the gift of God, what is left for man to do toward working out his salvation? I answer, it is left for man to pray. Here we have a strong motive for hearty prayer: for God has promised his Spirit to them that ask him. Do any of you wish for the help of that Spirit, without which you cannot grow up into trees of righteousness? Ask for it, and you shall have it. God is not a grudging giver: he delights to give bountifully. See how he deals with the plants of the field. How rarely does he withhold his rain from them! And shall he not much more pour out the influences of his Spirit upon those souls of immortal birth, that yearn to be reunited with him in Christ? Shall he not, when he has promised so to do? Bear in mind however: the promise is only to them that ask him. If any one neglects to ask heartily and pressingly, the promise reaches not to him.

Nor is prayer the only thing left us to do. The Bible, though it teaches us to be humble-minded, is no encourager of sloth. While it would have us on the one hand look to God for everything, like children who know that their food and clothing are the gifts of a good and loving father; on

the other hand it would have us work out our salvation as carefully and diligently as if everything depended on ourselves. And do we not deal thus in worldly matters? Every one knows that without rain the trees will not grow, that without sun the fruits will not ripen. Every one knows too that he cannot make the rain fall, or the sun shine, but that both the rain and the sunshine are the gifts of God most high. Yet who was ever hindered by knowing this from doing his best to improve his orchard, trusting in God to bless his labours. So it is with the spiritual orchard. It needs rain and sunshine: therefore we must pray for the rain and sunshine from above. But it also needs to be manured: therefore we must seek manure for it in the constant study of God's word, and in diligent attendance on the ordinances of his Church. Nor is it enough to enrich the ground, unless we also weed it: in like manner we must regularly weed our hearts by searching self-examination. He who is the most careful thus to weed and manure his heart, will be the first to feel his need of God's help: and he who prays for that help the most earnestly, will be the likeliest to employ the grace granted him to the purifying and strengthening of his soul. If he does so employ it, he will grow: he will make shoots upward. Christian graces will sprout from the trunk of such a tree one after another.

A third likeness between the spiritual and the natural tree is, that their growth is by degrees. A forest-tree does not spring up in a day, or in a month, or in a year. Nor do the trees of righteousness: they too want time to grow. What madness then must it be in any one to put off sowing and fostering the good seed in his heart, until the soil becomes hardened by neglect and age, and till no time, naturally speaking, is left him for the growth of holiness! Can such persons ever hope to grow up into trees of righteousness? trees! when they are to be planted in extreme old age—

perhaps not till death has already begun to lay his hand upon them. Gourds, and not trees of righteousness, would be a fitter name for them: for the suddenness of such would-be growth reminds one of the gourd of the prophet Jonah. But the righteousness which is to spring up like Jonah's gourd, will it not, even if it does spring up, perish also like Jonah's gourd? You may remember that God prepared a worm: and the worm smote the gourd, that it withered. What if this be the woful lot prepared for the gourds of righteousness! Plant your tree in good time then, that you may be trees, and not gourds, even such trees as David speaks of, trees whose increase of fruit keeps pace with the increase of their years.

The next, and perhaps the most remarkable point of likeness between the spiritual and vegetable life is the sap which flows through a healthy tree, and makes it thrive and grow. Thus is it with the trees of the forest; and thus it likewise is with the trees of righteousness. "The trees of the Lord (we read) are full of sap." In other words, they are full of christian feeling, which is the food and nourishment of christian practice. You can no more have the fruits of holiness, without the life-blood of christian love, than you can have a tree thriving and growing without sap. Godliness, as I have already said, is not a piece of handiwork, but a growth; and there can be no growth without life. Look then, brethren, to your christian life: look to your feelings and principles: look to your hearts; for out of them are the issues of life. Most of you must remember the passage in which our Saviour, after comparing himself to the vine, and his disciples to the branches, goes on thus: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. Without me ye can do nothing: but he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." (John xv. 4, 5.) Now

what is meant by our abiding in Christ? which Christ himself thus declares we must, before we can bear much fruit. Thus much, I think, must be clear from the words, taken in their soberest sense, that no outward conformity, no calling oneself a Christian, no cold attendance on the ceremonies of religion, can be called abiding in Christ. There must be a riddance of that pride and self-will, which cut a man off from God. We must ask of God to unite our hearts to himself, to purify our will, so that it may be one with his will, and to give us the power of making him the object of our daily thoughts, and receiving him into our inmost affections. This is the only union with God which men can strive after or aim at. Call to mind our Saviour's parting words: "Abide in me, and I in you." Abide in Christ, to use his own comparison, as closely as a branch abides in the parent tree. Take his will to be your will; take his affections to be your affections; take his thoughts, as far as possible, to be your thoughts. Draw the nourishment of your souls from him. Pray that the sap of his love may flow through your hearts, and give you spiritual life and strength and vigour to obey and serve God in spirit and in truth. For this is the end the sap is to answer. If it does not answer this end, we might as well be without it. "Herein is your Father glorified (says Christ) that ye bear much fruit." "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." Here is a sure test to try whether our hearts are right toward God. Are we bearing much fruit? Because unless we are, the sap of christian feeling and christian principle cannot be flowing through us. The proof of the sap is the healthiness of the tree: the proof of christian love is the holiness of christian practice. If our hearts are christian, our thoughts and tempers and daily behaviour will all be christian. We shall be Christians not in word only, but in deed.

The last points to which I mean to call your attention, are the deep root and tall stem of the tree. The finest trees are rooted deep in earth, and point in their uprightness to heaven. So too must we have our root of faith strong in Christ: so our hearts must look, our minds must turn, our souls must rise toward heaven. If you cut a tree off from its root, it dies: so does righteousness, if severed from faith. But if the root be strong and healthy, it will bear and feed a healthy and strong tree; so must faith, if healthy and strong, bear and feed a life of righteousness. As the stem however does not stand by its own strength, but by the strength of the root, so neither can righteousness stand by itself: if it stands at all, it must stand by faith.

Such are the trees of righteousness which the prophet speaks of in the text. Their planting is from God's word; their growth is from God's Spirit; their root is faith; their sap is love; they are full of the fruits of holiness; they mount far above the earth in their beautiful uprightness: they grow and point toward God. And shall they after all die? Verily I say to you, not one of them shall die. The Psalmist compares them to the straight palm and the strong cedar, the noblest and most imperishable of trees. And straight indeed are the truly righteous, in all their plans and all their ways, straight as the purest truth and the most self-denying honesty can make them; noble too, from having their hearts lifted so high above the meanness which earth and the things of earth are wont to breed. As for being imperishable, how can they perish? they, whom the Father loves, for whom the Son has died, whose sap is the Spirit of immortality. They shall be immortal as the Spirit who lives in them. They must be cut down indeed by death: but it will only be to spring up again, straighter, purer, higher, fuller of love, fuller of holiness, perfected

through God's mercy, to be brought into his immediate presence. Christ shall bring them to his Father, and say to him, "Behold these are the trees which thou hast given me of thy planting. I have watered them with my blood: I have nourished them with my Spirit. They took root, and gathered strength, and bore fruit to thy glory, even in the barren soil of a corrupt world. Grant, O Father, for thy word's sake, and for thy mercy's sake, that they may flourish in the courts of thy house." Would it delight you, brethren, to have words like these spoken of you? Do your hearts burn within you at the thought of being the objects of such favour, the heirs of such glory, the enjoyers of such heavenly happiness? If you do desire all this, be diligent to do your part. Pray for that Spirit which must feed your life: watch the seed which God has planted: turn to God in early youth, that you may have time to go on from strength to strength. Offer God a free-will offering of the best and brightest of your days: weed the heart; prune the heart; that your life may be a life of righteousness.

Such as I have described, and no other, were the beautiful trees, wherewith Solomon built and adorned his glorious temple. Such, and no other, must be the christian souls, wherewith a greater than Solomon will build his spiritual Church, and adorn the very courts of God. As for the misshapen and crooked and stunted tree, as for the fruit-tree which refuses to bear fruit, as for the tree of whatever kind that is dead and sapless at heart,—against that tree the sentence is gone out: it was uttered by Christ's own mouth; and I, as Christ's ambassador, entreat you all to lay it to heart. The sentence against the barren, the unimprovable tree is—Cut it down.

XXIII.

HARVEST LESSONS.

PROVERBS x. 5.

He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

IN my last sermon I set before you, how the Bible is wont to speak of spiritual truths in images and figures taken from country life: and I advised you to bear this in mind, so that, whether you ploughed or sowed, whether you saw the sun rise or set, you might turn whatever you do, and whatever you see, into food and matter for pious thought. Try (such was my advice to you) to find a spiritual meaning in all your daily work. It should be much easier for you to do so, than for people born and bred in towns: because the Bible says comparatively little about town matters, while it speaks often and largely about country matters. Look out then for the images and pictures which the Bible takes from country objects: store them up in your minds: and when at any time you meet with one of those objects, say within yourselves, "This should remind me of such a spiritual truth." For instance, sheep-shearing should remind you of the innocent and patient Jesus, the Lamb of God; how in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is

dumb, so he opened not his mouth." In the same way the hardness of the ground in a dry season, and the parched and withered state of all the herbage, should remind you of our great need of divine grace: which is such, that, unless God sends the rain of his Spirit on our hearts, they too will be dry and hard, and as barren as the barest common.

If you would thus accustom yourselves, with the help of Scripture, to seek for God and Christ in everything you do and see,—if you would get the habit of looking on earthly things as so many finger-posts and steps to guide and raise you to the knowledge and thought of spiritual things,—it is wonderful what improvement you would find. The more you tried to do this, and the more you prayed to God to enable you to do it, the more delightful the practice would become to you. You would feel yourselves brought evermore nearer to God in mind and thought. You would perceive new meanings in things. You would learn to see God everywhere. All your daily business would be hallowed to you; because God, or his Son, or his Spirit, his goodness to you, and your duty to him, would be traceable in everything you do. In a word, you would have God always before you; and thus your eyes would be open to discern the wondrous things of his law.

But example, they say, is better than precept: so I mean to give you an example of the way in which your daily business may be made to minister to the good of your souls. You have lately been busy about your harvest; and it is of harvest that I am going to speak to you. Now every attentive reader of the New Testament, as soon as he hears the word harvest, will be reminded of the harvest, which our Saviour speaks of in the parable of the tares. You may remember that, when the disciples asked him to shew them the meaning of that parable, he said: "The harvest is the end of the world;

the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels; and they shall gather out them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire." (Matt. xiii. 39-42.) Now if, when you have gone out to your daily task of reaping the corn which God has given us, you had kept these words of our Saviour's well in mind;—if, every day that you left your homes to reap, or to overlook your reapers, you had said within yourselves, "This present harvest is certainly of great importance to my worldly interests; but it is nothing in comparison of the harvest which is to come: that is the harvest to look forward to: that is the harvest to prepare for. God grant me his grace that during this present harvest I may behave as his child and servant, that I may not fall into condemnation at that dreadful harvest, when angels are to be the reapers, and sinners are to be treated like so many hurtful weeds, which are fit for nothing but to be burnt;" I put it to each of you, my brethren, whether it would not have been profitable to your souls, if you had accustomed yourselves through the present harvest never to begin your morning's work without some such seasonable thoughts. Would not much improper talk have been stopped by it, which has gone on not only among the men, but I fear I must add, among the women also? Would not your joy, as you brought the sheaves home, have been purer and gentler, and fuller of thankfulness to the Lord who giveth the increase? In a word, would not this have been a holier harvest to every one of you, if the thought of that last harvest, which our Saviour speaks of, had been continually before your minds?

But though this harvest at the end of the world, with the burning of the tares and chaff, and the gathering of the good sheaves into God's barn, which we are told shall then

take place,—though these are doubtless the first spiritual truths which a reader of his Bible will think of when he is going to harvest-work, yet these are not the only spiritual lessons to be drawn from the time of harvest. There are other very good and useful practical lessons to be drawn from that time besides. Some of these practical lessons I shall now point out to you, in speaking on the words which I have chosen for my text: "He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest causeth shame."

Taking these words in their literal and worldly sense, and applying them simply to the corn harvest, their meaning and truth are plain enough. Everybody will understand, that a father, who is old and past work, must be pleased to have a son on his farm so careful and active, as to watch his opportunities, and put forth all his strength just at the right time for housing the crop in the best condition. Such a son would be a pleasure to any father. On the one hand, a son who was the reverse of this, a son who slept, that is, who loitered and idled away his time in harvest, a son who wasted a fine day in going to a wake or merrymaking, instead of loading and hurrying on the waggons in his father's field,—such a son would bring shame on himself and on his family, when, owing to his sloth and idleness, the crop was left out too long, and so got damaged by a change of weather.

The truth of all this is plain: and if there had been nothing deeper than this in the proverb, I should never have taken it for a text. It might have been a verse for lads to get by heart; but it would not have been a verse to preach on. In the Bible however we may be sure that the marks of some spiritual truth, the seeds of some practical instruction, lie in every nook and corner. Let us pierce then through this first and most literal meaning of the text.

Let us try to get to the under soil, and see what lesson the words, when spiritually interpreted, will give us.

"He that gathereth in summer is a wise son." Summer, you know, is the right season for gathering in the harvest. To say then that it is wise to gather in summer, is only saying in other words, that a wise man will make the most of his opportunities, and will gather whatever he has to gather at the best and fittest season. Now is not this a practical lesson? a lesson too which many need? Is it not a practical lesson for children, as soon as they begin to learn? Their summer, so far as learning is concerned, is the time that they spend at school. That time is just as much the season for them to learn in, as the month of August is the season for their fathers to reap in. The same God who appointed the one season, has equally appointed the other. It is as much his will that children should learn at school, as that reapers should reap in summer. Let every child then, who goes to school, draw this lesson from the text. Let him say to himself, "This is the time for me to lay up a little store of knowledge. It is the time God has given me on purpose that I may learn his word. It is the time he has given me to learn prayers and hymns. If I miss this opportunity, perhaps I may never have another. Let me not throw it away then. Let me not be like the fool who sleeps in harvest, or I shall come to great shame."

Again, is it not a practical lesson for those who are in the prime and strength of life? These are in the summer of their days, so far as practice is concerned. The seeds of the good principles which were sown in them during their childhood should now be springing up in them, and ripening, and bearing fruit. You have all had opportunities of learning the great outlines of your duty to God and man. None of you can be ignorant that you have a God who made you, a Redeemer who died for you, a Holy Spirit who will make

you holy, if you will receive him into your hearts, and submit to his guidance. None of you can be ignorant that sin is exceedingly hateful in God's sight, that you are by nature prone to sin, that you have a continual need of God's help, to keep you from falling into some sin or other, and that this help must be sought for by diligent and hearty prayer. Nor can any of you be ignorant of the greatness of your debt to God: that you owe him everything you have: that every good thing you have enjoyed from the moment of your birth till now, every good thing you can hope to enjoy in this world or the next,—all is a gift, a free gift to you from God. On the other hand you cannot be ignorant what God requires from you in return for all his goodness; that he requires everything,—all your love, all your trust, all your fear, all your heart, all your mind, and all your soul. Or, to say the same thing more plainly by coming down to particulars, you cannot be ignorant that God requires you to pray to him, to praise him, to honour his name, his day, his word, to take every opportunity of learning his will, and to do all this with a true heart, out of love and thankfulness to him, and to his blessed Son who redeemed us with his blood. So too with regard to your duties to your fellow-men, you must all know that God requires you to speak the truth every one to his neighbour, to set a guard upon your mouths, to be careful that no untrue, or unholy, or impure, or violent, or bitter words, issue from your lips; that he requires you to be perfectly honest and upright in all your dealings, temperate in your food, plain and modest in your dress, sober, quiet, and self-denying in your amusements; that he requires you to be perfectly pure and chaste, not only by abstaining from adultery and fornication, and the like heathenish and open sins, but by keeping a watch over your very thoughts, and endeavouring to be pure in heart. Lastly, you must all be aware that God requires you to be peaceable, gentle, yielding, for-

giving, humble, kind to all, mild and affable to those below you, respectful to those above you, faithful and active in all your trusts and duties, doing these and every other good thing, not from any worldly or selfish motive, but as unto God, out of love to him, and because he commands you so to do. Thus much of your duty, I say, you must all know: at least if you do not (I am speaking of those who are arrived at manhood) if after living from your birth in a christian land, with a church open to you Sunday after Sunday, you are still ignorant of these things, the fault must needs be your own.

Well! "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them:" and the time for doing them is *now*, now that you are in the summer of life. You have learnt these great principles and rules of your duty to God and man, not for the sake of laying them up in your memories, nor to enable you to say that you know them. You were planted with them in your childhood, that in your riper age you might bring forth much fruit to the glory of God. And the time for bringing forth that fruit, if you are wise sons, wise sons of God, and faithful brethren of Christ,—I repeat it, the time is now. Do not sleep in this your spiritual harvest of duty to God and man. If you are far gone in manhood, and have slept hitherto, call to mind St. Paul's words, that now it is high time for you to awake out of that sleep. (Rom. xiii. 11.) If you are just entering into manhood, beware of falling into sleep. Remember that God requires from us the first-fruits of our days, just as he required from the children of Israel the first-fruits of their corn and oil. In every case avoid the too common snare of putting off the beginning of a christian life to a more convenient season. A more convenient season! What would you say of the farmer, who when his wheat was ripe on the ground, and the sun was shining in its summer strength, instead of putting

the sickle to the corn, began to make excuses, and say: "No, it is rather hot to-day; and it may rain next week: and there is a wedding I wish to go to at the other end of the county. I will put off my harvest for a month or so. The season then will be more convenient to me." If you would count such talk folly and madness in a farmer, what must it be in you? Surely "the life is more than meat." If it would be madness to put off the harvest of the bread that perishes, how worse than madness must it be to put off the harvest of holiness and obedience!

Again, another practical application of the text may be made to the way of keeping Sunday. Sunday is to the rest of the week in spirituals, what summer is to the rest of the year in temporals. It is the chief time for gathering knowledge to last you through the following week, just as summer is the chief season for gathering food to last you through the following twelvemonth. Do you make the most of this weekly summer? Do you, like wise sons, gather instruction by listening to the reader and the preacher? Do you gather fresh stores of grace and strength by diligent and humble attendance on the ordinances of God? Or do you sleep? Surely this question may well be asked in church. For many do sleep away their Sunday, some at church, and some at home: and many who keep the eyes of their body open, allow the eyes of their mind to close, and are no wiser and no better for all they hear with their ears and repeat with their lips in this place, than if they had not set their foot in it. Verily I must warn you, brethren, such sleepers do indeed cause shame. They are a shame to their minister, whose teaching they refuse to profit by. They are a shame to the Church, which received them when infants into her bosom. They are a disgrace to the Lord and Master, whose name they bear, but whose word they pay no heed to, and whose day they waste in sloth and carelessness.

Such are some of the simplest ways in which the text may be applied to spiritual and practical truths. Such are some of the various harvests which we are called to gather in; the harvest of youth, when we should gather knowledge, —the harvest of manhood, when we should gather holiness, —the harvest of the sabbath, when we should gather spiritual instruction, and meat for our soul's need. At all these seasons and in all these ways, it behoves us, my friends, to gather. Do you ask, how much? Why, all we can. Let your harvest then increase, until you yourselves are gathered to the Lord by Jesus Christ in the great harvest, according to the saying of the Psalmist: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (cxxvi. 6). You see the Psalmist says, *doubtless* he shall come again. And so it must needs be. He who came once as a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, bringing us the precious seed of God's word, will doubtless return again; but he will return no longer sorrowing. He will have seen of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. He will have collected the fruits of his glorious labours, the souls he has won, the spirits he has purified. So will he come again rejoicing, bringing these his sheaves with him. That you, my brethren, may have a place in that blessed harvest-home, God of his infinite mercy grant!

XXIV.

USE THE BIBLE.

LUKE viii. 11.

The seed is the word of God.

NEVER were there so many Bibles in the world as within the last few years. Our first feeling on hearing this ought to be thankfulness to God, for having sown the seed of eternal life so plentifully. But this brings the parable of the sower into our thoughts. One cannot help remembering the sad lesson it teaches,—that a great deal of seed may be sown to very little purpose; and that, if we are not careful how we hear and read, the mere reading and hearing can do us no good. Thus we are led to look a little closer into the matter, and to ask ourselves such questions as these:—Has the increase of godliness amongst us kept pace with the increase of our Bibles? Are we as much better as we ought to be with our more abundant means? Has the fresh seed scattered over the land produced a proportionate increase in the harvest? These are very important questions. For, if the Lord of the farm, if the great Sower does not see the promise of a crop in some measure answering to the good seed he has bestowed on the land, he will be sure to ask, "Why is this? Did I not sow good seed in the fields of

England? How then come they to be so full of tares? so full of thistles? so full of poppies? How is it that in some parts of the farm I even see the foxglove and the deadly nightshade? Useless weeds, gaudy weeds, weeds that overrun the ground, even poisonous weeds I see in it. But I see not the plenty of good wheat which I ought to find, and which alone can be stored in my barn. Why has the crop failed so shamefully?"

The failure of a crop must be owing to one or more of these four causes. Either the seed must be bad; or the season must be bad; or the land must be bad; or the tillage must be bad. Now the failure of a crop of holiness, if the crop has failed, in England, cannot be owing to the first of these causes; for the seed is as good as ever. The Bible has not grown worse, or lost any of its virtue. It is the same book it always was; and is just as able now, as it can ever have been of yore, to make men wise unto salvation. Nor is the failure of the crop owing to any peculiarly bad season. The influence of the Holy Ghost still falls, like mild showers, gently and plentifully on men's hearts, to soften and fit them for receiving the word of God. The Sun of Righteousness still shines and reigns in heaven; and from his golden throne, when the good wheat has sprung up and come to ear, he pours down warmth enough to ripen it and bring it to perfection. Nor again is the failure of the crop owing to the badness of the soil. Bad enough it is, to be sure, naturally; but we know how much the very worst soil may be bettered by care and labour. At any rate, it is not worse now. Man's heart is not worse now than it was formerly. If it brought forth fruit formerly,—nay, if in thousands and thousands of cases, it is made to bring forth good fruit now—fruit that we can see and judge of in the holiness, the uprightness, the meekness, the patience, the humble faith of sincerely good Christians,—

then it clearly cannot be the badness of the land that causes the failure of the crop. The land might be brought into cultivation in spite of its natural badness,—the heart might be reclaimed in spite of its natural corruption,—were proper care and pains bestowed on it. But in too many cases they are not. This is the woful truth; and to this is the scantiness of the crop owing. It is owing, we can trace it, to no other cause: it is owing to nothing but badness of tillage. The land is no worse than it used to be; the seasons are as good as ever: the Sun of Righteousness still sheds light and warmth; the dew of the Holy Spirit still falls; the word is still the seed of eternal life; it is scattered much more plentifully; much more land is sown; and yet, owing to the sloth, or the folly, or the dishonest negligence of the men to whom God has let his farm, the crop with all these advantages has not increased in due proportion. Think you, then, God will leave his farm in the hands of persons who so neglect it? Think you, he will continue to pour down the riches of his grace on us in such abundance, if we continue to disregard it, and to make him no return for it? Remember the barren fig-tree.

These are some of the thoughts and questions, which spring up in the mind of a thinking person on his hearing what a vast number of Bibles and New Testaments have been sold and given away in the course of the last few years. But another step is wanting to make these questions practically useful; and that is, to apply them to ourselves. Have we made the most of the opportunities which God has vouchsafed to us, of reading his word and learning his will? Some of us have enjoyed these opportunities from childhood upward; and these have the more to answer for. Others have had fresh opportunities of the kind offered them in later life. But what use have you made of them? Have you used the Bible at all? Have you used it regu-

larly? Have you read it for the purpose of trying to learn the will of God? Have you read it thankfully, and felt grateful to God, that, while so many of the wise and rich heathens are pining from lack of food for their souls, you have plenty,—that while they are left in darkness, you see? Have you read it devoutly, and prayed to God that he would enable you to understand what you read? so that you might apply the promises and the threats of Scripture, each to his own wants. Above all, have you endeavoured to practise what you have learnt? Have you kept well in mind that it is useless to read about God's will, unless we also do it? In a word, have you wished, and tried, and prayed to become, not wiser only by your reading, but better? These are home and searching questions, perhaps; but they are no way the worse for that. If they help you to search out the nature of your soul's disorder, be it spiritual sloth, or thoughtlessness, or a disregard for God's holy word,—be your spiritual malady what it may,—if these questions lead you to search it out, one of these days you will be thankful for them. As to their being home questions, what is the pulpit made for? why is the preacher set here, except to call you *home?* Home, ye lost sheep, to the fold of Christ your Shepherd! Home, ye prodigal sons, to the house of your loving Father! Home, ye truant children! your God is calling, your Master and Saviour is waiting for you; hasten home to him. Sin is not your home; for ye are heaven-born spirits! Earth is not your home; for Christ has redeemed you from its bondage! You are free to go where you please: back, then, to your only true home, to heaven. These are the very invitations which we, who have received the ministry of reconciliation, are to utter before you in Christ's name. The preacher is ordained on purpose to call your wandering hearts homeward. If the questions I have been putting to you help to do so,—if

they awaken you to bethink yourselves that you have all a journey to take,—some of you perhaps a long one,—and that the Bible is a book of rules and directions, given you by your heavenly Father, to guide you on this journey, and to show you the true and only road to his great mansion,—if they remind you that a book is of no use unless it is read, and that reading is of no use unless we practise what we read,—if these questions stir up thought of this kind within you, or put you in timely remembrance of these plain but most important truths, they do just what they ought to do. May God render them, and whatever else I may say to you in his name, and as his messenger, profitable to the welfare of your souls!

But questions are of no use, unless they are answered, and answered truly. I would therefore advise every one who owns a Bible or a New Testament, to think well what answer he can make to the questions I have been asking. They who can say yes, from the bottom of the heart, to all those questions,—they whose conscience bears them witness that they have regularly, thankfully, and with prayer to God searched the Book of Life, for the sake of learning to live,—these have good reason to rejoice, for they may feel sure that their prayers will be heard, and that their search after God will be rewarded. Though he may seem to hide himself from them for a season, it is only to draw them on to seek him with greater earnestness. He is near them all the time, and sooner or later will unveil himself. Just as men see, and can bear to look on the image of the sun in a clear fountain, so shall all such persons see God reflected in the character of his Christ. They shall see him in Christ's purity; they shall see him in Christ's patience; above all, they shall see him in Christ's love. He will teach them every truth necessary for their souls: he will lead them by his Spirit along the paths of holiness. On them the good

seed will not be thrown away; but they shall bring forth the fruit of good living every year more and more, until their Master sends Death to reap them, and gather them into his heavenly barn.

Such will be the blessed lot of those who are making a right use of God's good book, if they only persevere as they have begun. If they do not persevere, I need hardly tell you, all they have done hitherto will go for nothing. Their object as farmers is to house their corn: their object as travellers is to reach their home. If a man had to receive a legacy by going to Bristol, what good would it do him to set out on his way thither, unless he went all the way? Would he get anything by going as far as Melksham, or even as far as Bath, unless he went still further? The legacy is to be paid at Bristol, and nowhere else; and if the man is lazy or fickle enough to stop before he gets to Bristol, not a sixpence of it will he receive. Therefore we must persevere unto the journey's end, if we would have a share in Christ's great legacy. Or how would it fare with the farmer, if he were to leave his crop to rot on the ground, rather than be at the pains to harvest it? What good will his having sown it do him? Sowing is nothing unless we also reap; and even reaping the corn is nothing unless we afterward house it. But perhaps you will tell me, I am talking of impossibilities; for no man who thought a legacy worth going after was ever known to stop half-way; nor did any person, after ploughing and sowing his field, ever fail, when summer came, to harvest it. You would say truly. These are impossibilities in earthly matters; but are they impossibilities in heavenly matters? Do persons, after starting on their heavenly journey in the morning of life, with a heart full of godly resolutions, never flag? never loiter? never stop short? never turn round and ride back again? Do they, after putting their hand to the plough, never leave

it in mid-furrow? Would it were so! Heaven would be much fuller than it is. God's army is weakened not so much by desertion, as by straggling; and for one wretch who goes over openly and gives himself up to Satan, twenty are cut off by him, while they are idling and lingering in the rear.

Hitherto I have been speaking to those who have been making a good use of their Bibles, and New Testaments: and I have said such things as seemed likely to stir them to perseverance. But are there not some among you who have neglected to use their books? To them I will only say, Begin. If the miser's folly is great, who starves amid his chests of treasure,—if the sailor's folly would be great, who tried to steer without chart or compass,—if the farmer's folly would be great, who left his fields unsown,—how much greater must your folly be, who make no use of the charts and compass God has given you to guide you through the shoals of this world, who let your minds lie fallow of holiness, and who, with the food of angels on your shelves, starve your souls to death. Remember, man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. God's word is a portion of the food he has given to man to live by. It is the spiritual sustenance he has provided to support the spiritual part of us, the soul. For the soul, as well as the body, requires its fitting food. Both must be supported and nourished, if we would have them thrive. Were a man to feed nothing but the spiritual part of him, were he to do nothing but read and think and pray, we all know he would die of hunger. His body would pine away for want of bodily sustenance. And think you, if a man feeds nothing but his body, that his soul does not in like manner fall away and grow weaker and weaker for want of that spiritual food, which is its proper nourishment? I tell you, at last it would become so feeble, were it to go without all spiritual food, that a mere straw of a temptation

would be strong enough to overthrow its strongest resolution. The truth however is, that a man's soul is never left quite without all spiritual nourishment, so long as he comes to church, and attends to what goes on there. But church comes only once a week: and if the soul gets no spiritual food, beyond what it may pick up there, I leave you to judge whether it is likely to shoot up into a strong and healthy growth of godliness.

Wonder not that I speak to you of spiritual food. Does not all nature cry, from every part of the creation, that everything earthly must be fed? Fire must be fed: water must be fed: even the earth itself, which feeds all things, must be fed: else it will crumble into dust, or harden into a rock. So is it with the soul. That too, as well as the body, must be fed with food suited to its nature. This is so plain, that the heathens themselves knew it. They were fully aware that the soul would never thrive, unless it was nourished with food suitable to it: and to find that food was the great desire of the best and wisest men among them. With this view they betook themselves to philosophy, as they called it, that is, to the study of wisdom, in the hope of nourishing their souls with that. Alas! if we take out the few good grains which they found among the sweepings of the granary of tradition, if we take out the crumbs which some few of them had picked up under the children's table, their philosophy was little better than the acorns which the prodigal son was fain to stay his hunger on, because he could get nothing else. They stayed their spiritual hunger on the acorns of philosophy: because with all their search they could get nothing sounder or better. Now if they did this, they who only knew that their spirits required food, from feeling them crave for it, what will God say to us, if we are less anxious about the nourishment of our souls? We have been taught that man does not live by

bread alone: we have been exhorted by Christ himself not to labour only for the meat that perisheth, but rather for that good meat which endureth to everlasting life. Thus we have not been left to find out of ourselves, that our souls need support: we have this truth declared to us; and a command has been given us to feed them. Moreover the food is set before us. Those who have Bibles or New Testaments have it on their shelves: they have only to take and eat. If we then, who, instead of the acorns of man's wisdom, have the word of God, which is the bread of life, that word which our hearts can thrive on, that word which our souls may live by ages after this world has past away,—if we will not take this heavenly food, even when it has been so bountifully placed within our reach, how inexcusable shall we be!

For the Bible is not a charm, that keeping it on our shelves, or locking it up in a closet, can do us any good. Nor is it a story-book to read for amusement. It is sent to teach us our duty to God and man, to show us from what a height we are fallen by sin, and to what a far more glorious height we may soar, if we will put on the wings of faith and love. This is the use of the Bible; and this use we ought to make of it. Use it then for this purpose, each according to his means. All indeed have not time for much reading; but every one who wishes it may at least manage to read a verse or two, when he comes home of an evening, and of a morning before going to work. Now a couple of verses well thought over will do a man more good than whole chapters swallowed without thought. Do but this little, my brethren; and God, who judges us according to our means, and who looked with greater favour on the two mites of the poor widow, than on all the golden offerings of the rich, will accept your two verses and enable your souls to grow and gain strength by this their daily food. Christ, who is the way of life, will

open your eyes to see the way. He will send you the wings I just spoke of; and they shall bear you up to heaven.

For this must be always kept in mind, that God alone giveth the increase. Unless he gives it, no increase shall we receive. Our light will not be increased; so that we shall gain no new insight into the wondrous things of God's law. Our joy will not be increased; so that the study of God's book will continue an irksome task. Our labour will be without fruit; because it has been without a blessing; and we shall have to say, as the apostles did, before Jesus came to help them in their fishing, "We have toiled all night, and have caught nothing." (Luke v. 5.) The only way of insuring that our labour shall not be thus fruitless, is by prayer: the only way of drawing down a blessing on our study, is to ask for it. Let us pray then to Jesus, the author of our faith, that he will finish the good work he has begun. Let us beseech him to come to us by his Spirit and join himself to us, as he came and joined himself to the apostles, that our studies may prosper, and our labour be successful, and that out of the living waters of salvation we may draw truth, and hope, and constancy in well-doing, and gentleness, and active love towards all our fellow-creatures. Let us beseech him that "through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we may have hope." (Rom. xv. 4.) For unless there be patience there can be no comfort. If a medicine is to do us good, we must take it. If we read the Bible in the spirit of patience, it will bring us to a knowledge of ourselves. It describes and lays bare every evil propensity, every weakness, every wandering, to which the heart of man is liable. It comes home to our business and to our bosoms. It puts its finger on the dark spot within us, and plainly and loudly utters in the ears of every one those dreadful words, "Thou art the man." As you love

truth, as you prize the welfare of your souls, do not shrink from that touch, however painful; do not shut your ears against those warning words, however harsh. Be patient of Scripture truths. Place yourselves honestly, after prayer to God, in the light of those passages of the Bible, which fall the most piercingly on your besetting sin. Look at yourselves narrowly by that light: it will scatter any fogs which may be covering the hollows of your conscience, and will lead you from the darkness of contented ignorance into the pure and marvellous brightness of God. Begin with patience of God's holy word, and you will assuredly get in time to the comfort of it. Let us only be persuaded that our strength at the best is but weakness; let us be brought to feel that we are labouring under a sickness, which none save God can heal, that we are threatened by dangers which he alone can ward off, that he, and none else, can deliver us from the burden of our sorrow; let us be made to acknowledge these truths, and the Scriptures will become a well-spring of delight to us. For they, and they alone, shew our Maker to us in the character in which we shall then feel that we want him. We shall no longer ask with the confident lawyer, or with the self-satisfied young man, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke x. 25.) A much more painful question bursts from our stricken and bleeding hearts; and we cry out with the jailor of Philippi, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts xvi. 30.) The Bible, and the Bible alone, gives an answer to this question. For it speaks not of God alone, nor of man alone, but of God and man at once,—of God reconciled to man for the sake and merit of his Son: it speaks of the very thing which in our heaviness we long to hear of. Whatever may be the wounds we are suffering from, it has a balm and a medicine to heal them. As the good Samaritan poured oil and wine into the wounds of the bleeding and fainting Jew, so do the

Scriptures apply a like remedy to our wounded hearts, even the blood of the Son of God, which answers to the wine, and the anointing and sustaining influence of the Holy Spirit, which acts the part of the sweet and healing oil. In a word, the Bible sets before us the divine Emmanuel, God with us, who is not ashamed to call us brethren,—who places himself at our head, like a valiant captain, to cheer and lead us on to victory,—and who, having himself endured temptation, knows its danger and its power, and is therefore ready to succour us in the hour of trial, if we will only call to him for help.

This is the great comfort of the Scriptures, even Christ, "the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation." His glorious coming is called in the Gospel "the consolation of Israel." (Luke ii. 25.) When spiritually laid hold of, and practically applied by each man to his own needs, it is still the consolation of every true Christian. To us also, if we so lay hold on it, and so apply it, will it become a principle of life. Not of a fleshly and animal life, such as we share with beasts and birds: not of a life frail and perishable, which an accident may snap short at any moment; nor again of a life gross and sensual, which is merely the life of the baser part of us, the body, but the death or numbness of the soul. The life that God's word sows within us, is pure and spiritual and deathless. It is the blessed hope of everlasting life, which we are to embrace and hold fast through our Saviour.

But how can such a life,—this is the last point I shall touch on,—how can a life of this kind begin here? It can begin,—and, what is more, it must begin here, or it will never begin at all,—in our putting on the likeness of God and of his Son, whom to know and to follow after is life eternal. He is the true God, says St. John in his 1st Epistle, and eternal life. Would you have eternal life, the

hope of it, the foretaste of it in this world? you must draw nigh to Christ. He has promised that, if we draw nigh to him, he will draw nigh to us, and at last will come and take up his abode in our hearts, and will light the everlasting lamp of truth and love within us. An eternal life, I need hardly tell you, must be a heavenly life. Lead heavenly lives then and your lives will be eternal. But what are heavenly lives? such lives as are led in heaven, where all obey God's will. Such a life as our Saviour led on earth, whose meat and drink it was not to do his own will, but the will and the work of God the Father. Follow then after God's will faithfully and steadfastly: take the example and the principles of your Master for your guides: and they will lead you, it may be, through much trouble,—I have no warrant to promise you a freedom from earthly trials,—it may be, through evil report and contempt: for as they called your Master Beelzebub, and St. Paul mad, so will men at times speak ill of you, and think you mean-spirited and foolish. But, if you can bear up under these crosses,—and Christ for your sakes was loaded with a much heavier,—if you can walk along, notwithstanding your afflictions, in the path which Jesus trod before, it will bring you through the valley of the shadow of death to the glorious threshold of heaven. Is the path too rough for the delicate feet of human pride and passions? Let your feet be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; and you will find the path bearable enough. Be it rough, however, or be it smooth, walk along it we must, if we would go to heaven. For I should be deceiving you, if I did not tell you plainly, that the straight, the narrow, and the toilsome road, is the only one that leadeth upward.

We must imitate the behaviour of Jesus here, if we would live with him hereafter. That sublime devotion, which made his whole life one unceasing prayer, his pure, meek, self-

denying spirit, his love of all men, his special delight in those who shewed themselves by their faith to be true children of God,—these qualities, which are written in Scripture for our instruction, must all be copied by us, and written in our hearts and lives, before we can hope to have communion with the saints above. Amongst them such tempers, and no others, can gain admission: amongst them such tempers, and no others, could be happy.

XXV.

THE BEST CHRISTIAN, THE BEST PATRIOT.

1 SAMUEL ii. 30.

Them that honour me I will honour; and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

I AM going to speak to you about the historical books of the Old Testament. By the historical books I mean the Book of Joshua, the Book of Judges, the two Books of Samuel, the Books of Kings and of Chronicles, in a word, all those parts of the Old Testament which contain the history of the children of Israel, and relate their dealings and goings on from the time of Joshua, when they first crossed the river Jordan to conquer and take possession of the land of Canaan, down to the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, when Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the Jewish people were carried away captive far from their native land. These are the chief historical books of the Old Testament: out of them the lessons are taken for thirteen Sundays together, that is, for a quarter of the year. Now what do we learn from the book of God during this quarter of a year? Why has our Church appointed the fourth part of every year for the reading of chapters from these historical books? What are the chief truths which the great body of Christians are to gather from them? For

it must be clear to every one, that these chapters would not be read to you over and over again, year after year, unless the Church had hoped that the hearing them would in some way make you better. Moreover it must be clear to you, that a mere knowledge of the names and facts set down in these historical books can do you no good whatever. That Jehu was the captain who conspired against his master, that Joram was king of Israel, and Ahaziah king of Judah,—that the prophet Elisha's servant was called Gehazi,—what can it profit a man to know? Facts of this kind are like the beard of the barley: they are the part which first comes in sight, but yield no nourishment. If a person learnt nothing from Scripture, but a list of names and facts, such as that Samson was the strongest man, and that Solomon was the wisest, he would not be a jot the better for his knowledge. Knowledge of this sort may puff a man up with a vain conceit of his learning and cleverness; but most assuredly it cannot edify. One little verse from the Sermon on the Mount would be worth it all.

The lessons we are to draw from the histories of the Old Testament are not of names and facts, but of laws and principles. We are to look on those histories as shewing us the wires and springs by which God governs the world. That he does govern the world, that all nations of the earth are subject to him, and that he allots prosperity to this nation, and calamity to that nation, as seems best to him, we know. But in most cases we cannot make out the hows and the wherefores of his dealings with them. We see that one nation is raised, and another lowered: but the reasons of God's ordinances, and the way in which he brings his will to pass, are mostly hidden from us. So that the history of most countries may be likened to a great clock: we see the hands move, and hear the hours strike; but we cannot see and examine the works by which the hands are set in

motion, and the hours are made to strike. With the history of the Jews however it is otherwise. In their case God has lifted up the veil, which mostly covers his dealings with mankind: he has shown us the inside of the clock, and given us the means of observing how the wheels and pulleys act upon the hands. In other words, he has set before us in the Bible, how entirely the welfare of a nation depends upon the piety and true religion of the people. There is no truth appertaining to what is called political wisdom, so useful, so important, so indispensable to be known and kept in mind. In the history of the Jewish people, we see this truth set forth not once and again, but in every page. The sun does not ripen the wheat more regularly or more constantly, than God's favour attends the Jews and prospers them, when they are steadfast to walk in his paths. Nor are weeds of all kinds more certain to spring up in a neglected piece of ground, than God's judgments to fall on the children of Israel, whenever their hearts are set on evil.

I was comparing the world and its goings on to a clock. If a savage were to see a clock, and were not to be told that there are works which make it go, he would probably fancy it a live creature, or at any rate that the hands went of themselves. But after being shewn the works of any one clock, after some person had explained to him the uses of the wheels, and the pendulum, and the other parts, he would have no difficulty in making out that other clocks move on somewhat of the same principle: and he would never fall back into his former ignorant conceit, that the hands of any clock could go of their own accord. The mistake which I have supposed this ignorant savage to make about the going on of the clock, is the very same which the ignorant and irreligious are wont to make about the goings on of nations. They only see the outside of things. They will talk by the hour about the strength of armies, the size of fleets, the

amount of revenues: they will tell you, that such a kingdom has done well, because it had this or that able man at its head; while such another kingdom has fallen into decay, because its manufactures have been neglected, and its trade managed upon unwise principles. Deeper than this the irreligious go not. They never look within, at the religious spirit and moral character of a people. Much less do they think of the great Clockmaker, who regulates all the nations of the earth, who alone can wind them up, and without whom they are sure to go down. According to these persons a nation goes of itself, just as, according to the savage, the clock goes of itself. But they who have duly learnt the lessons given us by the Jewish history in the Bible,—they who have been let in to a nearer view of the secrets of God's workmanship, and have been taught by a careful study of the Old Testament, that it is righteousness which exalteth a nation, and that thrones are established by holiness,—such persons are prepared to judge of the goings on of the world much more piously, and much more wisely. They refer everything to God's providence. They try to trace the workings of his will throughout the web of human affairs; being well aware that, unless they follow its guidance, they never can hope to unravel so tangled a knot. Above all, they do their best, if I may so say, to obtain God's favour for their own country, knowing that, if he will but smile upon it, its safety and happiness are secured.

This is the great practical truth to be drawn from the historical books of the Old Testament: and the Church of England has wisely allotted a large portion of every year to a course of chapters teaching it: because it is a truth which nearly concerns every one, poor as well as rich, to bear in mind. I repeat it, the truth, that the safety and happiness of kingdoms depends solely on God's blessing, is a truth which it concerns every Englishman, poor as well as rich, to

keep in mind: for this plain reason,—because every Englishman can lend a helping hand toward drawing down that excellent blessing on his country. For what says king David in his 5th Psalm? "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice; let them even shout for joy, because thou defendest them; let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee; for thou, O Lord, wilt bless the righteous." To the same effect writes Solomon in the Book of Proverbs (xi. 11): "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." From these texts we learn that God blesses the righteous in such a way, that by their means and for their sakes nations are exalted. My brethren, we as a people need no further exaltation. In wealth, in strength, in renown, in extent of rich and cultivated dominion, in variety of possessions in every quarter of the globe, no nation was ever equal to us. In these respects God has raised us to a height unknown before, and has placed us on the very spire and pinnacle of glory. Let us take good heed that the height does not make us giddy. Let us look well to our footing, that we slip not. And how is this to be done? By praying to God to hold up our goings in his paths; by trusting in God that his mercy will preserve us; by acknowledging the Lord in all our ways, and seeking his heavenly wisdom, whereby alone men walk safely, so that their feet do not stumble.

But now who is to do all these things? Who is it, that for his country's sake is thus to pray to God, and to trust in him, and to acknowledge him, and to seek his heavenly wisdom? Perhaps you will say, the King. And the King certainly should do so first and foremost: for he is the head of the state, and as it were, its visible representative. In him the majesty of the nation centres; so that, whatever he does, the nation may be said to do. Besides, he has the choice of the governors and magistrates of the realm: if he

be righteous, the pious and good will be held in honour; but if he be irreligious, the wicked and dissolute will be promoted. Therefore, seeing that the piety of the King concerns us all so very nearly, it is with good reason that we are taught to pray every Sunday, that it will please God, not only to keep him in health and wealth, and to give him the victory over all his enemies, but also to endue him plenteously with heavenly gifts, to fill him with the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he may incline to God's will and walk in his way, and so to rule his heart in the fear and love of God, that he may above all things seek God's honour and glory.

But though the King ought certainly to set his people the example of honouring and serving God, unless the nation follow that example, his piety alone will not do. This was the state of things in the reign of the good king Josiah. We read that "like him there was no king before him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." Nevertheless, when he sent to inquire of the Lord for himself and for his people, to know whether God would bring on Judah the judgments he had denounced on their iniquities, what answer did the Lord make him? You will find it in the 22nd chapter of the 2nd Book of Kings. "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof; even all the words written in the book of the law of Moses, because they have forsaken me. But to the king of Judah, which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him: Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord when thou heardest what I spake against Jerusalem, and the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord; and I will gather thee to thy fathers; and thou shalt be gathered

into thy grave in peace: and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place." Such are God's dealings when a righteous king is found at the head of an ungodly and hardened people. He does not overlook the wickedness of the nation, for the sake of their pious ruler: but he mercifully takes the good king from the evil to come, and then pours out his vengeance upon the guilty land.

It is not enough then for the King to devote himself to God's service, unless the body of the nation do so likewise. But who are the body of the nation? and of whom is it made up? Surely it is made up of the King's subjects. All the English people taken together, all the men and women in England, make up the body of the English nation. Consequently you, my brethren, in your degree, and I in mine, each of us in his calling and station, forms a part,—a very small part, it is true, but still a visible part, a living part, an accountable part of this great nation,—a nation of which we and the rest of the people are the body, and the King is the head.

Now let me take a step further, and ask you,—supposing a prophet from heaven were to denounce God's judgments against us, for being a sinful nation, what would he mean by the words? Isaiah shall explain them to you. After complaining of Judah for being a sinful nation, he proceeds thus: "A people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers: they have forsaken the Lord, they are gone away backward; from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it" (i. 4, 6). A sinful nation, in one very plain and important sense of the words, is a nation the people whereof are sinful from top to bottom. And what is the consequence of such sinfulness? To the sinful Jews it was desolation and destruction. What then have we reason to dread it would be to sinful Christians, whose light is so much brighter, and whose opportunities are so much greater!

The truth, therefore, that states and kingdoms flourish and decay according to God's good pleasure, is indeed a practical truth which concerns every one. For we see that the sins of a nation are made up of the sins of all the people in it. The drunkenness of one man, the uncleanness of another, the dishonesty of a third, the oppression and covetousness of a fourth, the unbelief and profaneness of a fifth,—these things, small, as each of them may appear to be, make up the gross amount of a nation's guilt; just as a mountain may be made up of grains of sand, or as the great and deep sea, the very waves of which will rise mountain-high, is made up of a number of drops of water. There is an old and wise Eastern proverb, that it is the last straw which breaks the camel's back; and we have a saying not unlike it, that it is the last drop which makes the cup run over. My brethren, who of us can tell how full the cup of God's wrath may even now be against this land? Who can tell how many, or rather how few drops it may want, to make it overflow, and whelm us with the waters of bitterness. What can move God to stretch out his protecting hand, but the prayer and the repentance of his people?

But God is not unmerciful, to mark the evil only. His eyes are also upon the good. It is for them, for his children, that the events of this world are disposed. It is for the sake of the wheat that the tares are spared, lest, as our Saviour says, while the tares are gathered up, the good wheat be rooted up also. Every additional ear of good wheat, every new convert to Jesus Christ, is so much added to the safety of England. Were all good, the nation would be righteous, and God's favour would rest upon us. The land would be like the garden of Eden, so that all who visited it would say, See the land which the Lord hath blessed! On the other hand if all were evil, if the people had altogether corrupted itself, and forsaken the law of God,

the land would soon be turned into a wilderness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.

At present we are neither all good, nor, praised be God! all evil. But good and evil, piety and ungodliness, justice and fraud, mercy and oppression, are carrying on a mighty struggle, and dividing the people of the land. In this great war there are no neuters. Every one who is not on Christ's side, is against him. Every one therefore must choose his side. On which side will you be? I ask you, each of you, will you be on the side of Christ, which is the side of blessing? or will you be on the side of sin, which is the side of cursing? Will you be on the side of godliness, which calls down blessings upon England? or will you be on the side of wickedness, which is drawing down curses upon England? Yes, every wicked act tends to draw down a curse upon the country, and in that sense is the worst of treasons. Every good act on the contrary, every holy feeling, every true prayer, every victory over our baser appetites, every sacrifice of our will to the law of God,—every such act adds another stone to the spiritual rampart, which for so many years has surrounded and defended England. That rampart every one amongst us is either building up or pulling down. If the evil in the struggle overpower the good,—and every single desertion from good to evil makes the contest harder and more desperate,—if, I say, the evil should at last overpower the good,—should the rampart of justice and holiness be overthrown, think what a deluge of wickedness will pour in! and wherever wickedness makes its way, misery and woe follow at its heels. If you would avoid this misery, labour to repair the breaches in the rampart; lest the words be spoken to us, which were spoken formerly to Ezekiel, "And I sought for a man among them that should make up the hedge and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none" (xxii. 30).

May such words never be spoken to our country! God grant that England may never be without men to make up the hedge, and to stand in the gap before the Lord! God grant that she may never turn away from Him who alone can make up the hedge, who alone can stand in the gap before the Lord!

XXVI.

LOCK AND KEY;

OR,

PROPHECY AND INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY.

2 PETER i. 19—21.

> We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

THIS is a hard text to understand fully: but its general meaning is clear; and we shall have no difficulty in gathering enough from it to make a very useful lesson. St. Peter had been speaking of the proofs, which he and his brother apostles had received, of our Saviour's power and greatness. He had mentioned the wonderful proof granted them when Jesus was transfigured "in the holy mount," when they were eyewitnesses of his brightness and majesty, and heard the voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." After urging this great proof, as a man would, who had seen and heard such wonders, he goes on to a second proof, the proof from prophecy. Of this he says, that Christians would do well to give heed to it; for

that a prophecy is like a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn. As men burn a candle during the night to give light, so was God pleased to set up the lamp of prophecy in the world, to save mankind from being left in total darkness during the ages before the coming of Christ. This was the use of the prophecies before Christ's coming. They were designed to preserve a sense of God's goodness, and a recollection of his promises, to keep hope alive in the world, and to awaken men to the expectation of some great mercy, which God was preparing for his people, and would bring to light in due time.

But when the Sun of Righteousness had risen and chased away the darkness, the candlelight was no longer needed. Are we to suppose then, that the prophecies ceased to be of any use, when Jesus by his coming fulfilled them? They did indeed lose their former use of being lights in a dark place; but they acquired a new use instead. They became what St. Peter calls a surer word; that is, they became perhaps the strongest of the outward proofs, the most striking of the external testimonies to the truth of our Saviour's mission.

Do you ask, what makes their testimony so sure? St. Peter tells us: their not being of private interpretation; and their having been spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. They were not of *private* interpretation: that is, they did not refer merely to the events of the time and place when they were spoken, but they pointed far onward into futurity, and had a grander reference and application to the Son of God. Nor were the events which they pointed to so clear that a man on reading the prophecy could say, "This means so and so; this will be fulfilled in such and such a manner." Even the prophet himself did not understand them. He spake as he was moved by the Spirit of God: he gave utterance to the threats and pro-

mises which God put into his mouth: but how those threats and promises were to be fulfilled, neither he nor his hearers knew. So that the prophecies were like a door with a curious lock or secret spring to it. Till the secret of the spring is found out, till the right key is given, we may puzzle ourselves as long as we please, but we shall never open the door. Before the events took place, it was impossible to open the prophecies, so as to get clearly at their meaning. People contrived to peep through the chinks, and saw that the sight within was rich and glorious; and with that they were forced to be content. But when the events came and fitted the prophecies, just as the right key fits the lock, then the door was unfastened, and many of the prophecies were thrown open, and their meaning, so far as they spake of Jesus, was made manifest. I say, many of the prophecies were thrown open; because many are still closed. For the prophecies must not be compared to one room with one door, but to a great building with a number of rooms, each having its own door. Many of these rooms have been graciously thrown open to us: we have found them full of treasure: but others are still shut: we have not the right key to them; and perhaps we shall have to wait for it until the end of the world.

Be that as it may, our concern is, not with the prophecies which are closed and dark, but with those which are clear and open. Of these St. Peter says, that they are very sure: in other words, they are strong and satisfactory proofs and testimonies to the truth and character of Christ's mission, testimonies which there is no denying, and proofs which there ought to be no disputing. For just consider, if you saw half-a-dozen doors with as many different locks to them, so new and strange that not a smith in the country could make a key to fit any one of them, and if a man then came with a key, which fitted all these different locks, and opened

all the six doors,—could you doubt that his was the right key? Could you doubt that the key had been made for the locks? Now this is just the kind of proof which the prophecies afford of the truth and divinity of Jesus. When the Jewish nation was musing what these prophecies could mean, our Saviour said, "Lo I come, to do what is written of me in the volume of the book." I come to explain the prophecies, and to fulfil them. And so he did. The events of his life and the prophecies of the Old Testament fit and tally together so exactly and so wonderfully, in so many different points, that it is clear the agreement must have been designed,—designed by that God who first inspired the prophecies, and then sent his Son to fulfil them. This is a proof which it requires only good plain sense and an unprejudiced mind to judge of. It is a proof too which never wears out. It is just as sure now, as it was in St. Peter's time; and it will continue to be no less sure for a thousand, or ten thousand years to come.

The weight of this proof rests on two simple facts. One is, that the prophecies were written many hundreds of years before the birth of Christ. Of this there can be no doubt; because the Jews, who are our Saviour's enemies, have always had the Scriptures of the Old Testament in their keeping. The other fact is, that Jesus died the death related in the New Testament. The plainest prophecies are those which describe, not our Lord's actions, but his passion, not his life, but the manner of his death, and his patience under it, not what he did, but what he suffered. Therefore the only question is, did Christ really suffer the death recorded in the gospels? Of this again there can be no doubt. The Jews cannot deny, the heathens cannot deny, that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified as a malefactor by the Roman governor Pilate.

Here are two certain, undeniable facts. The date of the

prophecies is quite certain: the death and sufferings of Jesus are also quite certain. Now let any unprejudiced man, bearing these two facts in mind, read the 22nd Psalm and the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and then the account of our Saviour's trial and crucifixion in the four Gospels; and he must needs satisfy himself that David and Isaiah must have been moved by the Spirit of God, when they spoke of Christ ages before his birth, almost in the very words they would have used if they had been eyewitnesses of his death, and had written after the event, instead of hundreds of years before it. For we all know,—the plainest man knows just as well as the most learned,—that such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for mortal man; he cannot attain to it. It is not within the powers of man to tell for certain even what a day may bring forth: but to see the future, to speak of it as if it were lying before our eyes, to describe what is to happen upon earth ages after we have mouldered in our coffins, what man can pretend to a power of this kind? This is the prerogative of God. He, and he alone, can tell what is to happen: because he alone has the ordering of events, and calls them out of the womb of time, at the moment and in the manner that seems best to him. He alone can tell what will be: because he alone can command what shall be. Accordingly when God in Scripture is shewing the vanity and weakness of the heathen idols, he calls on them, if they are really gods, to prove themselves such by this very power of prophesying and foretelling. "Declare us things to come (he says to them), shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." (Isaiah xli. 22.) When we see a mortal man therefore possessed of this divine power, and employing it, as the prophets of old did, to the glory of God, can we doubt that he must have received this power as a gift from God himself? Can there be a doubt that the

prophecies came not by the will of man, but that holy men of God must have spoken as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?

Thus far I have been explaining the nature of that proof and evidence from prophecy, which St. Peter speaks of as so very sure. That you may better understand the matter, I will illustrate it by going through the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, to which I have already referred you, and comparing it with the accounts of our Saviour in the New Testament. For it is only by looking closely at this chapter, and taking it verse by verse, that you can discover how accurate the description, and consequently how perfect the proof is. This chapter is a continuation of the 52nd, in which the prophet speaks of the Lord's redeeming his people without money, of his comforting his people and of his making bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations. It is after declaring these glorious promises, that Isaiah breaks out in the first verse of the 53rd chapter, into that mournful question, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" In vain do I make you all these promises, says God; you will not believe them: in vain do I shew you my glorious arm; you shut your eyes against it. Such is the first prophecy in this chapter: and was it not fulfilled? When Jesus came in the fulness of time, did not the Jews disbelieve and reject him? With an express reference to the prophecy, St. John says, though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him; that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" (xii. 37, 38). In vain was the arm of the Lord made bare: in vain was the eternal Son of God revealed to his people. They shut their eyes against him, and would not acknowledge him.

Now how did this come to pass? Isaiah tells us in the

second verse. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." This is the reason why Jesus was rejected: because he came in a humble garb, with none of those outward marks of royalty, which the Jews were fondly looking for. Therefore, says Isaiah, they will reject him. Such is the second prophecy: and was not this too fulfilled? Did not Jesus come in the form of a servant, and make himself of no reputation? and is it not further true, that on this very account the Jews turned a deaf ear to his preaching, and would not believe in him? Hear what St. Mark says: "Many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given to him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary? And they were offended at him." (Mark vi. 2, 3.)

Thus far the prophecy and the event agree exactly. Let us see what comes next. "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not." This is so undeniable, it is so certain from every page of the New Testament that Jesus was a man of sorrows, that he was afflicted with all the afflictions which can befall mortal man, sin, and those which spring from sin, alone excepted,—it is so certain that he was treated with the utmost scorn, that he was rejected by those whom he came to save, that he was cast out and driven from place to place, and lastly that the wicked cruelty of his murderers was embittered by their insolent brutal mockery,—all this is so certain, that there can be no necessity for me to enter into any details on this point.

But perhaps you will ask, how it happened that the Son

of God came to us without form or comeliness? how it happened that, when the arm of the Lord was revealed, it was not revealed in its power and glory, but in the humble shape of the carpenter of Nazareth? If we look into this chapter of Isaiah, we shall see the reason in the 4th, 5th, and 6th verses. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This, my brethren, is the reason of Christ's humiliation. For our sakes he went through all: that we might be healed, he suffered stripes: that we might be forgiven, he was bruised and wounded: sinless himself, he was made a sin-offering for us: he bore the punishment of the iniquity of all the sons of men. To the same effect is that verse in the 40th Psalm: "My sins have taken such hold on me, that I am not able to look up; they are more in number than the hairs of my head: and my strength hath failed me." Compare these prophecies with the account of the agony in the garden, where drops of bloody sweat fell from our Saviour's forehead: and then determine whether they too have not been wholly fulfilled. When we cry to our Lord in the Litany to deliver us, you know we call upon him, among other things, "by his agony and bloody sweat;" thus reminding him of what he underwent for the sake of fallen man, and beseeching him to perfect the work he there began for us, that his grievous sufferings may not have been in vain. For whenever any one dies in his sins, Christ has suffered in vain, so far as that person is concerned. He might as well have stayed in heaven, for any good his agony can do to the unrepenting

sinner. Nay, better would it be for the stubborn, impenitent sinner, that Christ had never come at all. Better would it be for him, that there had been no agony, no cross, no sacrifice for sins, no offer of peace and pardon, than that the offer should be rejected, and the sacrifice slighted, and the cross and agony of the Son of God declared to him, without moving his soul to repentance. The word is sad; but it is most true. It would have been better for the sinner that Christ had never come, than that he should have come, and that the sinner should reject him. But to reject his offered pardon is to reject him; to reject his love is to reject him; to reject his doctrine is to reject him; to reject his laws is to reject him. Let not the sinner say, "I have no such wicked meaning. I have no thought of disowning or rejecting Christ: I acknowledge him to be my Lord and Master." Hold, sinner, and consider what you are saying. You have no thought of rejecting Christ? Beware then that you are not doing worse; beware that you are not mocking and insulting him. Remember the Roman soldiers. They even bowed their knees, and put a royal robe on him, and set a crown on his head: yet all this was only mockery; and the crown was a crown of thorns. Alas! the lip-service of the bold sinner is a worse mockery, and goes more to his heart; the sins of the believer are sharper thorns to him than any his crown was made of. They strike a bitter wound, and pierce deeper. To come into Christ's presence, and say you believe in him, and afterwards by your works to deny it,—is not this mockery? is not this downright insult? is it not ingratitude and treason against your benefactor and your King? That dreadful night of the agony was the night of the power of darkness. Among the temptations which the tempter then employed against Jesus, few could have been more cutting, than the thoughts of the multitudes of human beings to whom his Gospel would be preached in vain, to

whom his sufferings would bring no healing, on whom his death would only draw down a greater weight of wrath and condemnation. Cannot you conceive the tempter urging him with some such crafty words as these? "Why should you suffer all these things, thou well-meaning but mistaken Jesus? Think of the thousands who will never be the better for your death. Think of the thousands who will be the worse for your death. Think of all those who will be encouraged to sin on, by the trust that you have bought their pardon. Think of all those to whom your Gospel will bring, not life, but death,—not pardon, but condemnation. With such malicious thoughts may we conceive the father of lies to have assailed Jesus in that hour of bitterness: and the woe is, there was some truth in them; and that truth wrought like the barb of a poisoned arrow: it made the thought stick in the heart of Jesus and rankle there. For undoubtedly the Gospel of Jesus Christ, when it is not a savour of life unto life, is a savour of death unto death. If men do not become better and happier by it, they become more wicked and more wretched. If they do not become true Christians in heart and life, they become worse than heathens.

This perhaps may have been the weight which pressed the most heavily on the soul of the tender-hearted Jesus during his agony. Would God that, as these thoughts pressed on his mind, so they would press on ours! Would God, the thought of the great misery laid up for an unrepentant sinner which shook and wrung the soul of Jesus, so that an angel was sent to comfort him,—would God, this same thought would shake and wring every living sinner, and haunt him day and night, and give him no respite, till he were frightened and driven out of his sins, and brought to lead a holy life! Bad as are the pains of an awakened conscience, a sleeping conscience is far worse.

For you must awake some time. If you do not come to yourself before you are put into the grave, you must after. Here it is only the smart of a wound, which, however painful, is sure to be cured, if you put the proper salve to it. After death the wound is incurable. The God of truth hath spoken it, of all that die in their wickedness: their worm shall never die. Anything but that, O Lord! anything but that for the souls thou hast committed to my charge! Rather let our sins lay hold upon us in this world, and press us down with shame and sorrow, that we may all turn to thee while thou art to be found, and may obtain forgiveness of the past, and the help of the blessed Comforter to heal us, and purify us, and strengthen us for the time to come, that we may love thee and obey thee as we ought to do!

But let us return to Isaiah. Enough has been said to prove the fulfilment of the 4th, 5th and 6th verses of the prophecy, which declare that the Messiah was to bear our griefs and to carry our sorrows, and that the Lord would lay on him the iniquity of us all. Now observe what comes next; for the prophecy grows more particular and remarkable as it goes on. The next verses, as rendered by the learned Bishop Lowth, are as follows:—"It was exacted, and he was made answerable, and he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By an oppressive judgment he was taken off; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he smitten." In these verses we are told, first, that the Messiah, the promised Christ, was to be made answerable for a sum that was required; secondly, that he was to be taken off by an oppressive or unjust sentence; thirdly, that he was dumb and patient before his judges; fourthly, that

he was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and to be cut off for the sins of God's people. Here are four very extraordinary assertions; yet they are all fulfilled in Jesus.

In the first place, he was made answerable; for what? Isaiah does not tell us. He only says, "it was exacted." Look into St. Paul however, and you will find what was exacted. The ransom of the world,—the price of our salvation. For this was Jesus made answerable. It was exacted from him; and he paid it to the uttermost, with the treasure of his most precious blood. For this reason St. Paul admonishes us that we may not do as we please with ourselves; for that "we are not our own, but Christ's," seeing that "we are bought with a price." (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.)

The second thing foretold of the Messiah in these two verses is, that he was to be taken off by an oppressive or unjust sentence. Can anything be truer? Could Isaiah have expressed himself more accurately if he had written after the crucifixion? Was not the sentence against Jesus utterly oppressive and unjust? What did Pilate say, before he gave him up to be executed? "I find no fault in him:" so we learn from St. Luke and St. John. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person:" so we read in St. Matthew. Here the judge himself, at the very moment when he is delivering Jesus up to a most shameful and bitter death, declares the injustice of his own sentence, the cruelty of his own conduct.

The third thing prophesied of the Messiah in these two verses is, that he was to be dumb and patient before his judges. Now this is not usual, not likely, not natural. Innocent men do not commonly submit to a lawless and cruel sentence, without doing their best to defend themselves, and trying to clear their characters at least, if not to save their lives. Yet this too was fulfilled in the trial of Jesus, as

exactly as all the rest. We read in St. Matthew, that, when the council brought false witnesses against Jesus, that they might have something to lay to his charge, Jesus "held his peace;" not from pride and stubbornness of spirit, but, as he himself tells us (Luke xxii. 67, 68), because he knew that, if he told them the truth, they would not believe him, and that if he asked them questions, or tried to argue with them out of the Scriptures, they would neither answer him, nor let him go. It was not until the high-priest adjured him by the living God, to tell them whether he was the Christ, that Jesus made that noble answer, of which it is hard to say whether we ought most to admire its mildness or its courage. "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matt. xxvi. 64.) It was written in the Book of Daniel, that one like the Son of man should come in the clouds of heaven. The Jewish priests therefore were bound to believe that such a sight would one day be vouchsafed to them. Had they cared for justice, they would have given Jesus an opportunity of justifying himself, by asking what proof he could offer of his being the Son of man. Then might he have appealed to his mighty works. There would have been no want of witnesses. Blind Bartimæus restored to sight, the centurion's servant raised from the bed of sickness, the impotent man released by a few words from the infirmity which had crippled him for thirty-eight years; above all, Lazarus raised out of the grave after he had been four days dead. Here would have been proofs of divine power so manifest, that, though they would not have convinced or converted his enemies, they might perhaps have shamed them into silence. But no: the judges gave him no such opportunity of proving his mission. They stop him with the cry, "He hath spoken blasphemy!" they condemn him to

die, and send him bound to Pilate. Here the same scene of silence is repeated. "When he was accused by the chief priests, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate to him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." In St. John indeed we read of his speaking more than once to Pilate; but that was in private, and apparently not for his own sake, but for Pilate's. Against the public accusations of his countrymen he made no more answer or defence before Pilate, than he had made before the priests. Thus dumb was Jesus, as Isaiah prophesied he was to be. And was he not also patient? He who, when Peter had denied him thrice, only looked upon him; he, who, when he was suffering all the tortures of the cross, prayed to his Father for his murderers.

The fourth thing mentioned in these two verses is, that he was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and to be cut off for the sins of God's people. Hear what St. Peter says: "He did no sin; neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, but committed his cause to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." (1 Pet. ii. 22, 23.) But why is it said that he was to be brought as a *lamb* to the slaughter? At first sight this might seem to refer only to his innocence and his meekness. But the expression has a further and a deeper meaning. "Behold the Lamb of God," said John the Baptist of him, "which taketh away the sin of the world!" In this sense, above all others, is Jesus the Lamb. He is the Lamb ordained to death from the foundation of the world. As it is beautifully expressed in the Communion Service, he is the very paschal Lamb, which was offered for us, and hath taken away the sin of the world. It is as being a sacrifice, no less than for his purity, that

Jesus is likened by Isaiah to a lamb. He was, what the law of Moses required the paschal lamb to be, without blemish.

The next agreement is perhaps still more marvellous. "And his grave was permitted with the wicked," says Isaiah, "and with the rich man was his *tomb*." For that is the true translation, and not, as our Bible has it, "in his death." Here again the prophecy could scarcely be more accurate, if it had been written after the event. For Jesus did indeed go down to the grave with the wicked; or as the last verse of the chapter expresseth it, "he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors." He died as a criminal between two thieves. But where did he afterward find a tomb? Not with the transgressors, not with the wicked; but, O wonderful fulfilment of a most strange prophecy!—"when the evening was come" (these are St. Matthew's words), "there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple; he went to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock." Thus was this prophecy accomplished to the letter: thus did Jesus, after dying with the transgressors, receive a tomb with the rich.

Isaiah, then, as if for fear of being misunderstood,—for fear any one should imagine that the wonderful person, of whom he has been speaking throughout the chapter, had done something worthy of death, and deserved to be counted as a transgressor,—repeats himself, and again declares that all this befell him, though he had done no wrong, neither was there guile found in his mouth; because it "pleased Jehovah to crush him with affliction." Was God unmerciful or unjust in this? Far, far from it. For, as the prophet gives us to understand in the very next words, it was done with the Messiah's own consent. The words, when rightly translated, are as follows: "When his soul shall make an

offering for sin." It was the Messiah's soul or life then, that is, the Messiah himself, that was to make this offering. Was not this too accomplished? was not Jesus willing to die for mankind? Hear his own words: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep. No man taketh it from me; but I lay it down of myself." God then was not unjust in emptying the vial of his wrath upon Jesus; nor was he unmerciful in doing so. On the contrary it was the greatest act of mercy that could be. For why did Jesus die? For our sakes. The punishment which was due to us, he vouchsafed to take upon himself; and so, through the voluntary sin-offering of this one holy victim, thousands upon thousands have been made righteous, have been forgiven, have been purified from their offences, and raised to everlasting life.

Nor was the Messiah himself a loser by his sufferings, and by his wondrous love, as Isaiah plainly declares in the last three verses of our chapter, which in Bishop Lowth's translation stand thus: "When his soul shall make an offering for sin, he shall see a seed which shall prolong their days, and the gracious purpose of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Of the travail of his soul he shall see the fruit, and shall be satisfied. By the knowledge of him shall my righteous servant justify many; for the punishment of their iniquities shall he bear. Therefore will I distribute to him the many for his portion; and the mighty people shall he share for his spoil; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, and bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." The time will not allow me to go minutely into the fulfilment of these last three verses: nor is it needful; for you yourselves see their fulfilment. Has not God the Father highly exalted Jesus, that at his name millions of knees have bowed this very day? Does not Christ see a

XXVII.

PRINCIPLES ABOVE RULES;

OR,

WHEAT IS BETTER THAN BREAD.

COLOSSIANS ii. 20.

If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?

THE ordinances here spoken of are the ordinances of the law of Moses, which were only designed for a certain people, and for a certain time. They were designed for the Jewish people,—for that people out of which in the fullness of time the Saviour of the world was to spring: and they were designed to hold that people together, and to keep the expectation of the Saviour alive in it, until the Saviour himself came, to fulfil the law, and by fulfilling it to prepare the way for the downfall of all such parts of it as had merely been intended for their particular nation and age. Now this is a point in which there is a great and striking difference between the law of Moses and the law of the Gospel. One of the chief excellences of the precepts which we find in the New Testament, is, that they reach far beyond the occasions and purposes they were originally laid down for; so that, in spite of all the changes which have taken

place in the world since, they are many of them applicable to the letter, and all are still applicable in their spirit, at this very day. If you bear in mind that near eighteen hundred years have gone by since the apostles wrote those letters to the christian churches of their age, which we are wont to call Epistles, you will join with me in wondering, not that there should be a few sayings here and there in them dark and hard to be understood, but that there should be such a vast number of verses in them, every word of which we may still apply to ourselves, to the purifying of our hearts, and the building up of our souls, and the shaping of our lives.

Now to what is this excellence owing? In other words, what is the peculiar character of the precepts laid down in the New Testament, in consequence of which they do not pass away, like the ordinances of the law of Moses, but spread from land to land, and are handed down from generation to generation, and, wherever the Gospel is known, serve as a guide of life and practice to all classes and conditions of mankind? Their peculiar character is, that the apostles, doing as their Master had done before them, when they gave a rule for what was to be done in any case or on any occasion, were not satisfied with giving the bare rule, but to the rule added the principle, which was the ground of its wholesomeness and worth. Now between a mere rule, which is the applying of a principle to some particular case, and the principle itself, there is just the same sort of difference as between bread and wheat. Let me beg you to attend to this comparison, on which I mean to dwell for a while, as I hope by the help of it to render an important truth clear and almost easy to you.

A rule, which has been drawn up for any particular purpose, may be likened to a loaf of bread: a principle on the other hand is like a handful of wheat. Every rule that is

worth anything must be taken from a principle, just as a loaf of bread is made of wheat. For the wants and uses of the moment a rule is more serviceable than a principle; just as, when a man is hungry, bread is more welcome than wheat. For bread is wheat ready prepared for the sake of satisfying hunger: we have only to take and eat it. Hence for a hungry man a crust of bread is better and handier than so much unground wheat. Yet will anybody say on this account that bread is a better thing than wheat? Suppose a man were going to some far country, where no corn grows, which would he take with him? bread, or wheat? Suppose a sailor were thrown with his family on a desert island, which would he wish for? for bread, or for wheat? Assuredly a single handful of wheat would be a greater godsend to the poor castaway than a whole shipload of bread. Why so? because he could plant the wheat, and could not plant the bread. The bread after a time would get mouldy and be spoilt. The wheat, if it were sown, and proper care taken of it, would grow, and flourish, and spread, until large fields were covered with it: and generation after generation might be fed with the produce of the single handful.

This is the great advantage which wheat has over bread. Bread may feed us for the moment; but, when once eaten, it is gone for ever. Wheat on the contrary will bear seed: it will increase and multiply: after one crop has had its day, and been reaped, and stored in the barn, and consumed, another crop, provided seed be preserved, will spring up: and so long as the earth itself lasts, so long will corn last also. Thus too is it with rules and principles. A rule is like a loaf of bread. It is a ready, handy application of a principle, a principle made up for immediate use. By rules we govern and rule our children. We say to them, "Do this," or, "Don't do that:" because it is easy for them to

understand a plain order; but it is not always easy to make them understand the principle or reason of it. When the child however comes to be a man, he puts away childish things. He wants a new set of rules adapted to his new state: for he has outgrown the rules of childhood, so that they no longer fit him. The rules which belong to one stage of life, are many of them ill suited to other stages of life. In like manner the rules which belong to one class of men, or to one people, or to one age of the world, may not suit another class of men, or another people, or another age of the world. Hence different ages and different nations require different rules. To take an instance, the rule, or ordinance, or rite of circumcision, which St. Paul talks so much about, was suited to the nonage of religion: accordingly God appointed it as a rule or ordinance to be observed by the Jews, who were living so to say, in the infancy and childhood of religion. But when religion came of age, when by the blessing of Jesus Christ it reached its full growth and stature, it threw away circumcision as a badge of its childhood.

Now if every age of the world, and every people, and every class and order in society, and every stage of life, requires each its own rules, and if the rule which suits one will not suit another, how was God ever to give mankind rules enough to live by? What book is large enough to hold the countless swarms of them that would be wanted? Supposing that such a book had been written, it would have taken men their whole lives to read and learn it. What a hard matter too would it have been to pick out the rule needed for every particular occasion! The time for action would have gone by, while we were making out what it behoved us to do. Therefore God, when he was graciously pleased to give us a law which was to serve, not for one country and one people, but for the whole world, did not

give us an endless string of rules to be followed according to the letter in each particular case, but gave us the principles which are the ground and sources of all rules, and from which the rules are to be drawn. Even as for the nourishment of our bodies he has not given us bread, but wheat, leaving it for us to sow the wheat, and when it has come up, to reap it, and to thresh it, and to grind it, and to bake it into bread or cakes, or what we please; in like manner for the strengthening of our souls has he set before us what is good and right, not for one man more than another man, or for one country more than another country, or for one age more than another age, but for all men, in all countries, and in all ages: and having given us thus much, having given us the seeds of all rules, he has left us in great measure to grow the rules for ourselves; he has left us to apply the principles to particular cases, and so draw the rules for each case out of them. Thus, when he did away the ordinance of circumcision, at the very time when he took away the rule, he vouchsafed to give us the principle of that rule in its stead. When he abolished the rite by his apostle, St. Paul, he declared the meaning of the rite: he told us that the thing signified was the circumcision or purifying of the heart: and having thus shewn us this great and high principle,—a principle which concerns all mankind, and will concern them all until the end of the world, since all men have hearts to purify, and hearts that greatly need to be purified,—he has left it to the judgment and conscience of each of us to apply the principle to his own wants, and to frame rules for himself accordingly. Do we find that we cannot purge ourselves from carnal thoughts and desires, save by a strict course of abstinence and fasting? We are bound to circumcise our hearts by abstinence, and to lay down rules for our fasting. Do we find the amusements and going into company nourish the proud flesh within us, and fill

us with vain and idle imaginations? We must exercise our hearts by retirement, and must bind ourselves by rules to keep away from places of amusement. I say, we must bind ourselves; for in neither of these cases has God bound us. In all such matters he has left his people free. He has not said, like the Pharisees of old, Thou shalt fast so many times a week. He has not said, Thou shalt never go to a fair, or a merrymaking, or a cricket-match. But he has laid down the great principles, he has declared the all-embracing truths, that the poor in spirit shall inherit his kingdom, and that the poor in heart shall see him: and he has left each person to make out the bearings of these principles on his own case, and to seek these blessings of humility and purity by such methods, and according to such rules, as may be deemed best and safest, either by the man himself, or by the Church he is a member of. For the Church of each age and nation is bound in all such matters to help and guide its members in the interpretation and application of the principles laid down in Scripture to their own particular need: and it is much to be regretted that the practice of the Church of England in these latter times has been to leave people almost entirely to their own unassisted discretion. I cannot but think that it would be a very happy thing, especially for the poor and ignorant, if a little of the godly discipline, which prevailed in the primitive Church, could be restored.

What has been observed of circumcision might be extended pretty nearly to the whole Jewish law, as compared with the excellency of our more spiritual religion. Moses, who had to provide for the wants of a particular people, at a time when religion, as I said above, was only in its childhood, was instructed to treat them as we treat children, and to give them rules: "Touch not, taste not, handle not." These rules St. Paul in the text calls, "the rudi-

ments of the world," thus likening them to the rudiments or elements of knowledge, as it were, to the alphabet, which children have to begin with, in order that they may learn to read, and get a footing in the land of knowledge. Jesus Christ on the other hand, the Word and the Wisdom of the Most High, who came to establish religion in the fullness of its strength, and to furnish it with all such good gifts as its riper age required,—Jesus Christ, who spake for all men, for all nations, for all ages,—did not lay down rules, like Moses,—did not say, "Touch not, taste not, handle not." No: by an exertion of his power and wisdom more marvellous to a thinking mind than any, even the greatest miracle he ever wrought, he at once, by a few plain words, set religion free from all her former swaddling-clothes and leading-strings: he skimmed off the cream, as it were, of the law of Moses: in the room of burthensome rites and formal rules, he gave us the law of faith and love, and thereby made his doctrine a doctrine of principles, living, active, pure, universal, and eternal.

Somebody however may perhaps ask me, What is the worth of these principles, unless they bring forth good lives? You might just as well ask me, What is the worth of seed-corn unless it brings forth wheat, and flour, and bread? Good seed, if it be duly sown, and the care of the husbandman is not wanting, must, under God's blessing, bring forth a good crop of wheat, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold. In like manner good principles, if they are planted in a heart that has been duly ploughed and weeded, must bring forth good deeds, some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and some a hundredfold. The only difference is, that God's blessing is sometimes denied to the grower of the corn: to him God now and then sends a bad season, for a trial, it may be, of his patience, or to make him feel that he is wholly dependent upon Him who

is the Lord of the harvest, and the Giver of all good things. But to the diligent grower of good principles, to the man who is anxious to raise up the goodly plants of faith and love in his heart, God's blessing is never denied. His crop is sure not to fail. Sooner or later it will spring up abundantly in a rich harvest of good works. Of this we may be sure; for our Lord himself tells us so. "Every good tree," these are his words, "bringeth forth good fruit."

But why, if this be so, do I lay so much stress on the principles, and not rather speak to you of the good works which are to come from them? Because in the first place, the works without the principles are worth nothing. It is the motive, as we all know, that more than anything else renders an action good or bad. However fair the look of an action may be, if the right motive is wanting, the action is hollow: if the motive be a bad one, the action is rotten at the core. Who cares for an outward seeming or show of friendship or affection, unless the heart be also friendly and affectionate? Who does not prize a rough outside, when it covers an honest inside, more than the most fawning fondness from a heart that is cold and false? Thus it is right to insist on the principles for their own sake; because the principles give their value to the action, not the action to the principles. The principles are the gold on which the stamp is to be put: if the gold be not good, the stamp, though it may often deceive people, gives it no real worth; and he who graves the king's image on base metal, is sent to the gallows for forgery.

But further, it is right to enforce the principle rather than the action, because a good principle, as we have seen, is sure of producing good actions; whereas good actions, that is, actions which wear the outward show of goodness, are by no means sure of producing or fostering good principles. Take for example the giving of alms. There

can be no doubt that he who loves his neighbour as himself for Christ's sake, will relieve his wants: therefore there can be no doubt that, wherever there is christian love or charity, it must needs produce the giving of alms, and every other bountiful work. But is it equally certain that christian love will grow out of giving to the poor? Does not the Gospel tell us of the hypocrites who did their alms in the streets, to be seen of men? Can you think that a person who gave alms from such a corrupt, selfish motive, would be made better by what he did? Can you think that it would render him more bountiful, more compassionate, more affectionate? We know the contrary. We know that the more a man indulges any evil propensity, the more he falls under its sway, and the worse he becomes. If he indulges his vanity and selfishness, he is sure to become vainer and more selfish. Nor is it too much to say, that every action of seeming goodness, which does not flow from a sincere and honest heart, is so far from helping to make a man better, that it tends directly to make him still more the child of the devil and the slave of sin than he was before.

Be not deceived then, my brethren, by the idle talk, which the ungodly are wont to set up, that goodness, which from such lips means the mere outward show of what the world deems to be good, is better than religion; and that the only thing of importance is to teach children to do right, without caring about bringing them up in the fear and love of God. That goodness is better than religion, I will believe, when any man has convinced me that the rind of an orange is better than the whole orange. That teaching children to be honest, sober, and industrious, is better than bringing them up in christian holiness, I will not believe, until I have seen it proved that it is better to sow bread than to sow wheat. Make the bread; and take care that your children make the bread. Be careful that you yourselves keep, be careful to

make them keep, every wholesome rule for the conduct of life: teach them to walk in all the ordinances of the moral law blameless: teach them to do their duty, regularly, faithfully, exactly. Set them the example of industry, of sobriety, of honesty: and do your best to lead them to follow it. But sow the wheat, as you value your own souls, and theirs. Lose no opportunity, from the cradle upward, of teaching them to fear and to love God. Speak to them of God, of his power, of his purity, of his fatherly goodness: speak to them of Christ, and of his exceeding love in dying for us sinners: speak to them of the Holy Ghost, and bid them pray to him for comfort and help. Do this; and God, you may trust, will do the rest. He will take charge of the seed which you have dutifully sown. He will send down the dew of his Spirit upon it. The seed will grow up and prosper, and will blossom to everlasting life.

XXVIII.

PRAY WITH THE SPIRIT.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

I will pray with the spirit; and I will pray with the understanding also.

AMONG the evil customs which had crept into the Church of Corinth, one was that some of the teachers, or ministers, were wont to disturb the congregation by preaching and praying to them in a foreign language, which most of them could not understand: thus misemploying and abusing their gifts, for the sake of making their hearers stare, and of feeding their own vanity. The folly and mischief of such a practice is plain enough. What would you think of me, if I had been reading prayers to you in Latin this morning, or were to begin preaching to you in French? What could you be the better for the prayers? or what the wiser for the sermon? Now this is just what St. Paul is reproving in the chapter from which the text is taken. He sets forth the uselessness of speaking to a congregation in a language they are ignorant of. If any man pray, he says, in an unknown or foreign tongue, his spirit indeed prayeth, but his understanding is unfruitful: that is to say, his soul, or spirit may pray; but his meaning will be hidden from his hearers; and his words, not being understood by them, will yield them no fruit. Then comes the text, "What is it

then?" or, what ought we do then? "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also." In other words, when we assemble together for the worship of God, the ministers are not to pray with the spirit, or soul only, for their own edification and improvement; but every minister ought so to pray, that the people may understand him, and that even the most unlearned, knowing what is asked for, may be able, as we read in the next verse, to say *amen* from the heart, at the end of each petition.

This is the strict and primary meaning of the text, the meaning which, if we consider the circumstances of the case, St. Paul had chiefly in view, when he wrote this part of his epistle. His purpose was to reprove and correct the extravagant conceit of the prayer-utterers, whose vanity led them to pray before the people in a language nobody could understand. Since those times however things are changed, and in this respect happily for the better. No one can now get up in one of our churches, and disturb the congregation by praying in an unknown or foreign tongue. We have a form of sound words given us in the Prayer-book, which every minister of the Church of England is bound to keep to, and which every minister does keep to from one end of the kingdom to the other. Go where you will, into whatever church you will, in London, in any country town, in any village, in the most out-of-the-way hamlet, you will everywhere hear the same morning service in the morning, the same evening service in the evening: you will hear the same Psalms, the same Lessons, the same thanksgivings, the same prayers. In the furthest corners of England, in Wales, in Ireland, nay even in the East and West Indies, wherever the brethren of our Church meet together to worship God, you would hear the same wise and sober and hearty and pious and truly christian praises and petitions, which you have been used to in this place from your childhood.

What shall we say then? Shall we flatter ourselves that the command in the text,—for such we may deem it,—to pray with the spirit, and to pray also with the understanding, cannot apply to us? Shall we fancy that it belongs only to a state of things which is gone by, that it is out of date, and that we have no concern with it? My brethren, the truths of the Bible can never be out of date. The state of things, which led Jesus and his apostles to set forth certain principles, will of course change; for everything earthly does: but a new state of things arises in its room, on which the same principles bear. The true Christian therefore, feeling that the principles delivered in the New Testament are a solemn trust, which he is to use to the best of his judgment, according to the circumstances he is placed in, will not be satisfied with learning how St. Paul applied a principle in the times wherein he lived, but will rather ask himself, how would St. Paul have applied the same principle now, if he had been living in these days? For that is the point which concerns us. What was meant by praying with the spirit and with the understanding eighteen hundred years ago, is in great measure a question of curiosity. But how to pray with the spirit and with the understanding now, is a question of plain practice. For surely no one will imagine that it is of less consequence for us, than it was for the first Christians, to employ our minds and our hearts, as well as our tongues, in God's service. No one who knows anything of the New Testament, can fancy it possible for us to serve God acceptably, unless we worship him in spirit and in truth, and serve him with a reasonable service. Nay, even before the coming of Christ, it was the same. Thus we read at the beginning of the 103rd Psalm, "Praise the Lord, O my soul!"—not my tongue or my voice, but *my soul*: here you have David praying with the spirit:—and what comes next? "And all that is within me praise his

holy name." You see, according to David, a man should praise God with *all* that is within him. Is his understanding within him? He ought to praise God with his understanding. Is his memory within him? He ought to praise God with his memory, by remembering all his benefits. In a word, whatever powers of mind and heart and soul he may be gifted with, David in the 103rd Psalm, and in many other places besides, teaches him to exert them all, when he is praising, and of course also when he is praying to God. But if this was the duty of God's faithful servants even before Christ's coming, how much more must it be so now that Christ is come, and has set us free from the yoke of rites and ceremonies, and, instead of all those burthensome sacrifices and observances, which pressed so heavily on the Jews of old, requires nothing of us save that we should worship God in spirit and in truth, and serve him with a reasonable service.

What, I say, is the change which has taken place in the application of St. Paul's principle, that men should pray with the spirit, and also with the understanding, to the present state of our Church? The main change is this. When St. Paul wrote the words, he addressed them to the prayer-utterers, to warn them against uttering prayers which the people did not understand. That fault has been corrected in the simplest manner, by doing away with prayer-utterers, and establishing prayer-readers. Instead of persons getting up and praying without book, as it is called, which was the practice in early times, and led, as we have seen, to great abuses, our Church, in its wisdom, has appointed regular forms of prayer, which are to be read out of the Prayerbook, so that the people may bear a part in the service, if they will only attend to it. St. Paul's words therefore are now addressed not to the prayer-utterers, who in our Church are not to be found, but mainly to the prayer-hearers, that is, to you. It is to yourselves that you are to apply

the command to pray both with the spirit and with the understanding: for it is to you that St. Paul himself would mainly apply it, were he to come to life again and preach on it.

In the first place you should pray with the spirit: that is, you should feel what you say, and should wish for what you ask. If you do not, your prayers will be a mere pretence. When you pray to God to pardon your sins for instance, it is clear that you acknowledge yourselves to have sinned in such a way as to need pardon. Else why do you ask it? Does any one ask for what he does not want? Praying too is more than common asking. Praying is asking earnestly as we do when we greatly desire what we ask for. Do we, then, when we pray for God's forgiveness, beg hard for it, as for some boon that we really long for? If we do not,—and alas! how few do!—we cannot be said to pray with the spirit.

But you may ask me, how is a man to get to feel such a longing for God's forgiveness, as shall make him pray for it with his heart, or with his spirit, as well as with his tongue? Some of you may be tempted to say within yourselves: "It is not my fault that I do not feel all this: I have tried to do so, and cannot." To such a man I answer, I believe it, I believe it fully. Nothing is more certain than that we cannot of ourselves call up spiritual feelings in our hearts at pleasure. Man in his natural unassisted state, man without the help of the Holy Ghost, cannot love the things of God. St. Paul's language on this point is clear and positive: and even if he had never written a word about the matter, one could hardly look round the world, one could not look into one's own heart, and not perceive, that it is not natural for man to love the things of God. Many of God's laws we can keep naturally, or at least with no more than the ordinary and scant measure of divine grace which must have

been vouchsafed even to the heathens. For example, the light of conscience and the checks of laws and education are enough to hold most men back from the grosser offences against their neighbours, such as murder and adultery. Again, a man may be induced to eschew certain vices, by observing their evil consequences in this world. He may see that brawls abroad and sickness at home often follow after strong drink, and for this reason may shun drunkenness. In like manner he may be led to thrift and industry, by noticing how surely waste and sloth bring a man to rags and hunger. Or he may be rendered cleanly and regular by remarking the discomforts and troubles of dirt, untidiness, and disorder. Further, a man, without being a Christian, may do many kind and praiseworthy actions, out of a regard for public opinion,—from the principles to be met with even in such books as have no concern with religion,—or through an easy, cheerful temper, and a compassionate heart. To this pitch of excellence we often see an irreligious man may attain. And what does it amount to? To harmlessness, which is the virtue of the sheep; to industry, which is the virtue of the ant; to prudence, which is the virtue of the bee; to friendliness and generosity, strong traces of which may be found in the half-human dog. I do not say that there may not now and then be an example of an irreligious man rising beyond this, and devoting himself to the service of his fellow-creatures out of what seems to be pure love. But, generally speaking, the virtues of the irreligious are only animal virtues. They are only excellences which belong to man as an observing and social animal: the proof of which is, that even the beasts that perish share them with him. Mind, I am not saying that thrift and industry and friendliness are not good qualities. They are good, they are excellent qualities; and nobody can be a true Christian without them. But, excellent as

they are, they are not spiritual qualities, and, when standing by themselves, can no more make a Christian, than wood without sails can make a ship. A plank of wood, you know, will float of itself, and, if large enough, will bear up a man who lays hold on it. So a person having those animal good qualities, which lie within the reach of the natural man, will float on the tide of this world, and, as the phrase is, will keep his head above water. But would you prepare for the voyage which you must all undertake? would you speed toward the haven where we shall all one day wish to be? Mere wood will not serve: you must get sails. To the virtues of this world you must add the feelings of another world. To the animal good qualities, which, as animals, we have in common with the gentler and more social of the brutes, you must add those spiritual graces which raise man to a brotherhood with the angels. This is the one thing especially needful; which yet no man can do for himself. No man can say, "I will love God." No man can say, "I will grieve for having offended God by my coldness and negligence in his service." These feelings are no longer natural to us: we lost them at the Fall; and ever since a man can no more bid them spring up in his heart, than the hull of a ship can fit itself out for sea, and wing itself with sails for starting.

But, if we are commanded to pray with the spirit, and yet so to pray is not natural to man, surely we are in evil case, and God has dealt hardly with us, in requiring a duty which it does not rest with us to pay. Not so, my brethren, God is no such hard taskmaster. All that he demands of his servants is, that they give him back his gifts with increase. Though no one can say of himself, "I will pray with the spirit," every one can say, "I will pray to God so to change my heart, that I may have the heart to pray to him:" and God has promised his Spirit to them that ask him. "I will

pour," he says, by the mouth of his prophet Zechariah (xii. 10), "upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem,"—that is, on all the members of Christ's Church,—"the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced,"—that is, on Christ whom we have hurt and pierced by our sins;—"and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." No promise can be more express or plainer; and its parts follow one another in a most instructive order. First we have the spirit of grace and supplication poured on us; for without that we can do nothing. The next step is, that the spirit thus given to us leads us to look on Christ whom we have pierced. In other words, we are moved to think much and often of all that Jesus Christ suffered on the cross; and then, when our minds are thus filled with pity and honour, to look within and call to mind that it was for our transgressions, lightly as we deem of them, that he was wounded, and that, if he was bruised and smitten and afflicted, it was for our iniquities and sins. The habit thus wrought in us of looking at sin in connexion with the cross of Christ, as the true cause of all his sufferings, and as the curse which he bore for us on the tree,—this habit is fitted to set the guilt and hatefulness of disobeying God in the clearest and strongest light, and is of all ways the likeliest to work on our hearts. Therefore it is not surprising that the prophecy, after telling us that we shall look on him whom we have pierced, should go on to promise that we shall mourn for him with bitter mourning. For, though the love of God is not natural to man, pity and compassion and gratitude are. These sparks of our original brightness, these roots and stumps, if I may so call them, from the land of Eden, we all bear about us more or less. It is natural to grieve for the loss of a dear and kind friend: and if he died

a violent, a bloody, a painful death,—if he never did anything to draw down such a death on himself,—if he bore his sufferings patiently and meekly,—all this is sure to swell our grief.

Suppose however that it was for us, and in our defence, that our dear kind friend met his death; suppose that we were travelling together, and that the villains aimed the blow at us, but our friend stepped between and caught it, and saved our life by sacrificing his own,—would not this add tenfold to our grief and love for him? Must I go on still further? When we saw him struck down, instead of standing by him, and fighting a little for him, who had just given his life for us,—how shall I speak of such shameful cowardice—we took fright, we ran away, and left him to die! We meant indeed to alarm the neighbourhood: we vowed within ourselves that we would come back very shortly with all the men we could muster, to seize and punish the murderers. But one of them for fear of this took a purse from our poor friend's pocket, and threw us a few pieces of gold. Some of his blood flowed that way, and there was a red spot on one of them: but what of that? We had a bill to make up; winter was coming, when work is scarce: seizing the thieves could not bring our friend to life again: so we turned back and picked up the gold, and went halves with the murderers of our preserver. Now I would ask you, when the poor wretches who had been guilty of such cowardice, such baseness, such treachery, such ingratitude, came to themselves, would they not mourn? Unless their consciences were utterly seared, surely they must mourn bitterly.

Such, or something like it, is the way in which the Holy Spirit brings us to mourn for sin. He places Jesus Christ before us hanging on the cross: he points out his hands, his feet, his wounded side, and then cries to us, "This is thy doing."

Should we deny the charge,—as most of us would, protesting that we had no hand in the deed, that we have always hated it, that from the bottom of our souls we abhor the wicked Jews, who crucified our Lord and Master,—the Holy Spirit sets before us some such parable as I have been telling you, and then stops our mouth with three short questions. The first question is, "Did not Christ die for you? and must not the curse due to sin have fallen on each of you, if Jesus had not stepped between, and shielded and saved you by giving his life for yours?" To this there can be but one answer: for St. Paul says plainly (Gal. iii. 13), "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law,"—by the law, the law of justice, we are all accursed,—"being made a curse for us." The second question is, "Who were the real murderers of Jesus Christ?" To this again there can be but one answer: the sins of men, on account of which he died, and the devil who bribed Judas Iscariot to betray him. The third and last question is, "Have you, since you were taught these things in your childhood, ever been wilfully guilty of any act of sin? have you ever taken a bribe from the devil, in the shape of some unlawful pleasure, some forbidden gain, or some angry, spiteful, or envious feeling harboured and cherished against your neighbour? Have you ever in these or any other ways taken the devil's wages to do his work instead of fighting against him, as you ought always to be doing, beside the cross of your crucified Redeemer?" This is the third and last question: and to this also only one answer can be given. We have all of us, every child of Adam has, more or less, parleyed and made truce with the arch-enemy of his Saviour. Most too at some time or other have entered into his service, at least for a season, by indulging in some known sin: and so the price of blood,—the blood of our greatest friend, of our chiefest benefactor, of our only Saviour,—the price of the blood of

the Son of God is on our souls. In this manner does the Holy Ghost convince men of sin, and bring them to mourn for their past conduct, and prove himself to be the Spirit of supplication, by stirring us to supplicate heartily for pardon. If you then at any time feel a contented coldness creep over your souls, beware of it, as of a drowsiness which may end in death. Fall straightway on your knees, and ask for the Holy Spirit to enlighten you. Then take your Bible, and read over the 26th and 27th chapters of St. Matthew, or the 22nd and 23rd chapters of St. Luke. Having thus placed Christ as it were on the cross before your eyes, turn to the Sermon on the Mount, and try yourselves by it. So shall you be brought to look on him whom you have pierced: you shall be brought to feel by your sins he was pierced, and shall be filled with the spirit of supplication.

This, my brethren, is what a man ought to do, if he feels that coldness and languor, which so many complain of feeling, when they come to church and try to pray. The man who feels this palsy,—for it is a palsy of the soul,—should say to himself: "I am sick: I have that sad numbing disease, which I inherit from our common father Adam: a cold chill has come over my soul: I must go at once to the great Physician." Then he should kneel down, and pray to God for the spirit of prayer: and having done this, he should await God's good pleasure, nothing doubting but that sooner or later God will hear him, and will pour down the spirit of supplication abundantly upon him. Only we are not to reckon on God's hearkening to us forthwith. He may; and so gracious is he, perhaps he will. But on the other hand it is possible he may not hearken to us forthwith: so we should be prepared for the delay. For the Holy Ghost is God's best gift; and a father very seldom gives his best gift to his children the moment they begin to ask for it. A small thing he may perhaps give them readily: but, if the

gift be great and precious, so that he would have them set great store by it, he will often make them wait a while that they may feel the want of it, and prize it the more when given. Thus do earthly parents deal with their children: and our heavenly Father often deals with his children in the same way. He knows how little we are apt to think of a thing that we can get easily: so he often tarries and delays for a season to be gracious, and even as it were hides his face from us, to accustom us to wait patiently for his time and pleasure, to teach us that every good gift comes to us from him alone, and to make us feel our great need and the great value of his Spirit, that we may use it the more diligently, and husband it the more carefully, when at length he pours it down upon us.

For pour it down at length he will, if we only persevere in asking for it: pour it into our souls he will, and that too most largely and richly. This is the purport of the two parables which we find in the 11th and 18th chapters of St. Luke, the parable of the man who went to his neighbour at midnight to ask him for three loaves, and the parable of the importunate widow. In the latter of these parables the unjust judge, a person who neither feared God, nor regarded man, is represented as being moved by the prayers of a poor widow to do her justice; not because he felt pity, as a man should, for her helpless and forlorn condition; but because she troubled him with her entreaties, and he foresaw that she would keep on coming to him, so that he should have no rest till he had seen her righted. Now what is the meaning of this parable? Not surely that the Creator of the ends of the earth can be wearied out by much speaking. Much less can it mean that God is an unjust Judge who will not do right, except he be constrained to it. The parable means, that, if even an unjust and godless judge, when he had no intention of helping the poor widow, was driven to

do so by her importunity, that is, by her unceasingly repeated teasing and wearing entreaties, then great must be the force of importunity, great indeed must be the power of continual earnest prayer.

But here the old difficulty comes across us again. I am trying to shew you how you may get to pray. I have been setting before you the case of a man whose soul is palsied and benumbed, who has the sense to see that he ought to pray with his heart, as well as with his lips, but who when he tries to do so, finds that he cannot, that his heart is cold and lifeless. Now it is plain that a man in this state cannot pray with importunity: in truth he cannot pray at all. His heart does not go along with his lips; and, till it does, there can be no praying. It may seem little better than mockery then to advise a man in this plight to follow the example of the poor widow: just as it would be mockery to tell a paralytic man, who can neither stir hand nor foot, that, if he will take a walk on the downs every morning, he will be sure to get well. Would not the poor fellow, whose body was palsied, make answer, "Why talk to me about walking, when you see I cannot move?" So the other poor man, whose soul is palsied, might likewise make answer, when I spoke to him of the widow in the parable, "Why tell me to pray with importunity, when I cannot pray at all? The poor widow was no doubt very anxious and eager to have justice done her; and so she craved and cried for it. But I have no such anxiety and craving for the blessing of God in my heart: how then can I cry for it as she cried?"

I have stated the difficulty as plainly as I can; and my answer shall be just as plain. If you cannot pray continually, you can ask continually: and that, to begin with, will do as well. For God requires nothing impossible. He reckons with every man according to what he has, and not according to what he has not. Let every one then do the

best he can. He who has been enabled to pray, let him pray. He who has not learnt to pray yet, let him ask. Asking is the weakness, and as it were the infancy of prayer. We pray for that which we earnestly desire: we ask for that which we believe will do us good, though we have no great relish or wish for it. Thus a sick man has no great liking for his physic: yet he can ask for it, if he is persuaded it will cure him. When it is brought to him, he can take it, however unpalatable, and be it ever so many times a day. So you too can all of you ask God for the bitter medicine of repentance, if you really believe it will be for the good of your souls. You can ask for what your understanding tells you is wholesome, though your heart may be too sick to relish it. In a word, you are to try to pray, at church and at home, morning and evening, just as the sick man forces himself to take the draught at the hour ordered by the physician. If you do this, and persevere in doing it, to the best of your power, I will promise you, what nobody can promise to the sick man: I will promise you, that you will recover, that your spiritual palsy will be cured, that your heart will be brought into harmony with your understanding, and will no longer utter a low and false note, when your reason and conscience strike a high and true one.

This is the lesson taught us in the other parable I referred to, the parable of the loaves; which seems designed to encourage Christians at their first starting on the right road. In that parable a friend comes from far late at night unexpectedly to a poor man's cottage, who has nothing in the house to give him for supper. So he runs to his next neighbour, knocks at the door, and begs to borrow three loaves of him. But his neighbour bids him go away; for he and all his family are in bed, and he cannot get up and open the door. The poor man however is loth that his friend should go supperless after his journey: so he will

take no denial, but goes on knocking at the door, till his neighbour, to be rid of him, lets him have the loaves. Now we cannot suppose that the man who went to his neighbour for the loaves, had it as much at heart to get them, as the poor widow must have had it at heart to get justice. His then can only have been asking, while hers was real praying. Yet he was no less importunate in asking for bread, than she was in praying for justice. As she went on praying and praying, so he went on asking and asking; and neither of them would take a denial. Thus both these parables teach us the same lesson, that we should continue instant and urgent in our petitions to God for spiritual gifts, and that we are not to slacken or grow fainthearted in case God makes as though he did not hear. Both too hold out the same promise: and God, you know, "keepeth his promise for ever." That promise you shall have in our Lord's own words. "I say unto you,"—it is Jesus Christ who is speaking,—"Ask, and it shall be given you. If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil,"—that is, if men in a natural and unregenerated state,—"know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" So that there is no longer any room for doubt, seeing that God by the mouth of his blessed Son has expressly promised his Holy Spirit to us, provided we persevere in asking for it: just as in the parable of the importunate widow he has promised to uphold us against our ghostly adversary, and, notwithstanding all his accusations, to give sentence for us in the great day, provided we persevere in praying to him earnestly and fervently, as men who pray with the spirit.

This then is the way to get to pray with the spirit. We must ask for the spirit to pray with: and that not once, or twice, but constantly, regularly as for our daily bread,

unceasingly, so as to take no denial. If we do this, God from time to time will pour down a fresh supply of that best gift of his, "the spirit of grace and supplication." Observe the order of the name, that it is first the spirit of grace, and then the spirit of supplication. From the spirit of grace we receive whatever is more closely connected with the covenant of grace, that is, with God's offer of a free pardon to all who will repent and turn to him for the sake of his crucified Son. Thus by the spirit of grace we are taught, in the way I explained to you above, to feel first the great evil of sin, and then the love of Christ in dying for us. By the same spirit we are filled with a grateful love to God and to his Son for this their marvellous loving-kindness. Lastly, by the same spirit are opened on our souls such views of the perfection we ought to aim at, such bright glimpses of the graces we ought to seek,—such as the grace of holiness, the grace of patience, the graces of meekness, and temperance, and brotherly love, and self-denial,—that, while we feel our natural want of power to attain to such heavenly heights of godliness, our souls are nevertheless stirred to long for them and strive after them, knowing that, though without God we can do nothing, yet by his help we can do all things. These thoughts and feelings the spirit of grace awakens and kindles in us; and by so doing it becomes the spirit of supplication. For it is as impossible, when the fire is put to the wood, that the flame and smoke on a clear day should not rise upward, as that, when a heart is warmed by these holy feelings, the sweet incense of fervent prayer should not rise from it to God the Father. Rather will such a man always be offering, not the offering of his lips indeed, but the far more precious one of his heart. His thoughts, his feelings, his hopes, his wishes, will at all times look and soar heavenward. As the excellent Bishop Taylor has beautifully expressed it, his whole life will be one continual prayer.

XXIX.

PRAY WITH THE UNDERSTANDING.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

I will pray with the spirit; and I will pray with the understanding also.

OF praying with the spirit I have spoken to you already. But this, with all its importance, is not enough: we must pray with the understanding also. The reason is clear. We are God's property. Whatever we may possess, —be it the powers of our bodies, or the faculties of our minds, or the feelings of our hearts,—all were made by him. Therefore of right they all belong to him; and we only hold them under him, as tenants at will. Now it is the duty of tenants to pay rent: and rent accordingly God demands of us. But what sort of rent? Rent in kind; a portion, yes, and the best portion of every improvable faculty he has entrusted to us. When God gave the promised land to the Jews, he reserved the first-fruits for himself. The first-fruits of their wine and oil were to be set apart; so were the first-lings of their flocks and herds; and so was the fat of all the beasts that they killed. These things were a sort of reserved rent, which God kept for himself, out of the abundance of the good things wherewith he enriched his people: and they were to be employed as he appointed in his law,

partly in sacrifice, partly in the support of his ministers. Now we are God's heavenly people, just as the Jews were his earthly people. As they were bound to set apart a choice portion of all the produce of their land for him, who was their earthly king, so ought we to offer and dedicate to our heavenly king a like portion of all the produce of our souls.

Were the Jews to pay God first-fruits? So should we. Listen to this, ye young; for this more particularly concerns you. You have still all your first-fruits before you. You, and you alone, still have that most precious of all first-fruits, the first-fruits of your lives. Offer them to God, by giving yourselves up to him, soul and body, while you are yet young. Believe me, who am somewhat older; or else ask the oldest man amongst us, and, if he was not religious in early life, he will tell you he is sorry for it now: if he was, he will bid you, in the words of the Psalmist (xxxvii. 38), "Keep innocency, and take heed to the thing that is right; for that brings a man peace at the last." Offer the first-fruits of your lives to God, and he will greatly increase your strength; he will enable you to withstand temptation, and will make you men, in St. Paul's sense of the word, even men after the pattern of Jesus Christ himself.

Again, were the Jews to offer the firstlings of their flocks? So should we. You, parents, should offer him, and rear up for his service, those children who have been made lambs of Christ's flock by their baptism. You should begin from the very first,—you cannot begin too early,—to train them up by your teaching and example to be a holy generation to the Lord. For think of the trust which God puts into your hands, when he gives you children. Think what a child is; that it is an unfledged angel, who has fallen to earth from a great height, just as a young bird sometimes falls out of its nest, and breaks its wings. Thus our wings

also, my brethren, thus the child's wings are broken by the fall: and God sends the young creature to us, to rear it, and do our best to cure it, and so to train it up for finding its way back to heaven.

Lastly, were the Jews to set apart the fat of every animal, and to offer it in sacrifice to God? This should teach us to set apart a goodly portion, the fat, as it were, of all our faculties, to be employed in the christian sacrifice of prayer. Such is the rent we are to pay to God for the many blessings he has bestowed on us: out of every one of them we are to give him back that which is choicest and best.

Thus much, I trust, is clear. If so, the duty of praying with the understanding will not need many words. For of all the powers and faculties that God has given us in trust, the chief is the reason or understanding. It is this that distinguishes us from the brute animals. It is this that raises us to be only a little lower than the angels, and that fits us to be candidates for heaven. Therefore, being our chief gift, we are in duty bound to employ it in the service of God.

Some of you will perhaps tell me, that it is not our understanding, but our speech that distinguishes us from the brute animals, and will remind me that for this reason they are so often called dumb creatures, to mark the difference between them and us. It is true, they are so called, and very justly: for speech is one of the main advantages which we enjoy over the beasts of the field. But it is not our only advantage over them; nor is it the chief. You will see this in a moment, by minding what speech is. It is not the mere power of making sounds and noises: most of the animals that we call dumb can do this. Speech is the power, not of making ourselves heard merely, but of making ourselves understood. It is the power of telling each other what we think and feel, the utterance of one understanding

to another understanding. Unless speech does this, unless it expresses either thoughts or feelings, it misses its proper mark, and becomes unmeaning gabble, no better than the blustering of the wind. Yet how many, when they pray, that is, when they speak to God,—for prayer is nothing else than speaking earnestly to God about the things we need and wish for,—how many, when they come to church, send their thoughts and feelings wandering after other matters, and behave as if they fancied the sound of the words and the motion of the lips would be enough! Is this praying? It is not even speaking. For speaking requires thought: yet these people give no thought to what they say. It is merely repeating a string of sounds, which will draw down anything but a blessing.

God has showered down his spiritual blessings upon you, and has placed you amid opportunities for learning his will greater almost than are enjoyed by any other nation. You are not stinted in the means for becoming holy and godly. Churches, services, sacraments, Bible, Prayerbook . . . an Englishman in a country village has them all; or it is his own fault if he has not. Sunday after Sunday, from the reading-desk and the pulpit, you may all hear in your own tongue the wonderful works of God. God of his free bounty has done all this for you. He might have cast your lots, as he has that of so many others, among the benighted heathens, among the poor negroes, among the most ignorant and wretched of mankind. Instead of this, he has cast your lot here, in a Protestant and a free land, amid an overflowing abundance of all the outward means of grace and knowledge. God, I say, has done all this for you: what ought you then to do for him in return? You ought to bless him from the bottom of your hearts for giving you all these means of becoming wise unto salvation; and you ought to shew your sense of his goodness by prizing those

means, and by making a right use of them. If you do not use and apply them for the purposes for which God intends them,—if you do not learn by their help to love his holy law and to keep it,—the means, so far as you are concerned, are thrown away: and you will be in the unhappy situation of the persons spoken of by our Saviour, who, having been first, became last. Having been first in advantages, first in opportunities, first in the clearness and frequency with which God called you to come to heaven, you by your own laziness and carelessness will become last, and will have the pain and shame of seeing the very heathens admitted into heaven before you. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (says our Lord to the Jews, Luke xiii. 28), "when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." So would he say to the unprofitable Christian: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth: for you will see those holy men, the confessors and martyrs of the English church, by whose labours the Scriptures were translated, the Prayerbook was put together, the Psalms, Lessons, Litany, and Collects were selected and appointed to be read in the order best fitted to awaken and instruct the people,—you will see these holy men, who, having thus gathered together such a rich treasure of godliness for the use of their countrymen, became martyrs, and laid down their lives gladly, rather than let the Church of England be thrown back into ignorance and error,—you will see these glorious men, for these their pious works, high in the sunshine of God's favour; and you will feel that, if you had profited by the treasures they bequeathed to you, if you had made a right use of the means of grace which those martyrs bought for you at the price of their blood, you, according to your degree, would have been where they are, and would have had places at the same table. But you rejected all

warning while it was time. Therefore from being first you are become last, and must inherit the portion of the last. You must go away from heaven into outer darkness, afar from the blessed sight of God's countenance." This is the language which Jesus Christ would address to a careless and unprofitable Christian. This is the language which by me, his minister, he does address to such as neglect to profit by the means of grace, to such as neglect to pray both with the spirit and with the understanding. If there be any such among you to him have these words been spoken: let him lay them to heart.

Here some of you may perhaps answer me, that you do prize the means and the books of grace, that you have shewn this by your wish to get Bibles and New Testaments, and that you are fond of reading them now you have got them, and of hearing them read by others. You do well. But do you also prize the Prayerbook? I fear not. I should have had more applications for Prayerbooks, and should see more of them in church. Without a Prayerbook, a man, unless he has a very good memory indeed, cannot go along with the minister through the service; and the poor man who does not follow the service in church, loses the best opportunity of religious instruction which a grown-up person can have. By attending to the prayers in church, you may be taught to pray: you will learn what to ask for, and may learn too by degrees how to ask for it. The service is indeed intended for the good of those who cannot read, as well as of those who can: and even the former, if they will take pains, and do their best to listen to the minister, will learn after a few Sundays to repeat parts of the prayers, or at all events to know what comes next; and so may add their secret wishes to the words which are uttered in their ears. I was once told of a very old and very poor woman, who was forced by weakness and sickness

to keep her bed, and who in this state used to spend much of her time in repeating collects and other prayers. A lady, who often visited the poor woman, asked her one day, how it came that she could say so many prayers, seeing she had never been at school, and could not read. "It is very true," said the good woman, "I never learnt to read. But I have been a churchgoer all my life; and one Sunday I brought away a few words of a prayer; and the next Sunday I brought away a few words more; and so by degrees I learnt to say a great many of them. And now nobody can think the comfort they are to me, and the pleasure it gives me to say them." A comfort indeed they must have been to her even here: and the Lord, who accepted the widow's mite, will not fail to accept her prayers, and to reward her for them hereafter. Now there is nothing in what this woman did, which every one else may not do just as well. If it were the custom in our churches, as it is in some places, for the minister to pray out of his own head, the old woman might have listened all her life without being able to learn a single prayer. But as it is, those among you who cannot read, and who have not the means of learning, may still follow her example. In doing so the way would be to begin with one of the shorter prayers, such as, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord;" and, after learning this bit by bit, to go on to others that are longer. Mind however, this is only for those who cannot learn to read: all who can, are bound to learn; and, when they have learnt, let them read their Prayerbook, and endeavour to pray with the understanding.

It is a blessed thing for every man, for a poor and ignorant man it is most blessed, to live in a land where, once at least every week, he may hear and be reminded of his duty to God. You may now and then pick up something from a neighbour, who happens to have been better taught: but

how few will be at the pains of doing this! No one who is so careless about heavenly things, as not to do his best to learn in church, is likely to take much pleasure in religious talk out of church. Indeed for those who cannot read, church is almost the only opportunity of learning the will of God, and all that Christ has done for men. For those who can read too, even for those who well know and understand all the main truths contained in the Bible, the church-service is of great use, in stirring up their recollection of them. For this world is like the enchanted ground which we read of in the "Pilgrim's Progress," the air of which was apt to produce drowsiness in such as had occasion to pass over it. In like manner do the cares and business and pleasures of life take up and lull our minds, until we fall asleep on the road to heaven. So that the very best of us has need of a friendly shake to waken and rouse him from time to time. Nor did any man ever keep away from church, unless on account of illness, for six months together, without being sensibly the worse for it: though he may not be aware of this himself; because he will not examine himself regularly, nor take a full and true account of his thoughts and actions. If he did he would find that his piety had slackened, that his love to God had grown colder: happy, if he did not also find that he had caught some bad habit, and fallen into the practice of some known sin. But to the poor, to whom the church is the best school, and often the only one they can go to,—to the poor, who on workdays have little leisure for reading, and who sometimes know not how to read,—our church-service is invaluable. In the hope of leading you to set a due store by it, I purpose to explain it to you hereafter; and with God's blessing shall go through the Order for Morning Prayer, with the view of enabling you, so far as in me lies, to pray, as befits reasonable beings, and as St. Paul commands us, with the understanding.

The prayers however are not the whole of the Prayer-book: far from it. There are also those beautiful Psalms, which are fitted above all other writings to kindle a spirit of devotion in the heart. Then there are the Gospels and Epistles, of which I need not speak, as they are copied word for word out of the New Testament. They shew how vain is the objection, which one sometimes hears brought against the Prayerbook, when persons, instead of judging it fairly, according to what it is in itself, try to disparage it by comparing it with the Bible, and speak slightingly of it, because it is the work of man, and therefore not equal to the work of God. They might as well speak slightingly of a house, because that too is the work of man, and therefore not so grand as the sky above our heads, which was created by the word of God. There is a very simple answer to such objections. We have need of both. The sky was not meant to keep us from building houses to shelter ourselves; nor was the Bible meant to hinder us from composing prayers to express our wants and desires. But the fact is, that nearly two-thirds of the Prayerbook are taken word for word out of the Bible, being made up of the Psalms, and of the choicest and most useful passages in the New Testament, put together for the edifying of the people. And shall we not prize such a work? a work, nearly two-thirds of which are Scripture,—a work, the whole of which is founded on Scripture,—a work, by which the spiritual necessities of every class amongst us are plentifully supplied. Shall we not love such a book? If we do, let us show our love by making a worthy use of it.

Many persons, I believe, who try to learn from the sermon and from the Lessons, attend very little to the prayers. But this is a sad mistake. For the privilege of praying to him is the greatest that God has given to us. He who does not pray, neglects this privilege, and throws away the opportunity afforded him of speaking to God himself. So far from

not caring about the prayers, you should say to yourselves, before you come to church, "I am going to the court of my King and my God, who is my Father also. I am going to speak to God himself. It is true I cannot see him: but the Bible teaches me that, where two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, there Christ is in the midst of them. So that I know he will be there. I will not be afraid to speak to him: for the apostle exhorts us to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and help. I want mercy from God; for I often sin against him. I want help from him; for I am often tempted to disobey him; and I know my own weakness too well to put any trust in myself. This mercy and this help, which I have such great need of, I will ask from God this morning. I will ask boldly, as a son would ask a favour from a kind and rich father: but I will ask reverently, as I ought, when speaking to my King and God." If people would come to church with thoughts of this kind, the service would no longer be tedious to them. Anything is tedious and tiresome, in which we feel no interest. It would be tiresome, if we had lost our appetite, to be forced to sit through a long dinner: but no hungry man ever complained of its being tiresome to sit down to a table covered with dainty meats. So, if a man feels no appetite for prayer, the church-service will seem long and tiresome to him; and he will be disposed to say, with the profane Israelites, "What a weariness is this!" (Mal. i. 13.) But he who hungers after righteousness, he who feels he has much to ask for, will duly prize the privilege of being allowed to speak to God: he will make the most of the opportunity which our service gives him of addressing his heavenly Father and King: he will be thankful that such good words are put into his mouth, to teach him how to pray. The service will become a matter of real business to him. He will be desirous of learning; and so he will learn. He will

be greedy of obtaining blessings; and so he will obtain them. Our Saviour's promise to those who hunger after righteousness will be accomplished in him: he will be filled.

Here let me remind you, how bountiful your heavenly Father has been to you, in ordaining that every Sunday should be a day of rest, on which you should have no other labour, no other employment, than that of learning to do his will. Think what rich, what abundant opportunities for that purpose the holy rest of the sabbath gives you. One often hears people complaining that they have no time to make themselves acquainted with God, and his works, and his ways, and his will. Whose fault must that be? Assuredly it must be their own. God has given them time enough. My brethren, did you ever call to mind that a seventh part of your whole lives is made up of Sundays? One week in every seven is a week of Sundays. One month in every seven is a month of Sundays. One year in every seven is a year of Sundays. A year of Sundays! And shall any one dare to plead that he has not had time to learn the will of God? "Not time enough! (the Judge will answer:) What have you done then with your years of Sundays?" Let us take a man in the prime of life, say at six or seven and thirty, cut off and summoned into the presence of Christ. What opportunities, what time, think you, has that man had for learning his duty to his Maker? Without counting infancy and early childhood, he has had four good years of Sundays,—four years during which it ought to have been his special business to listen to God's word read and preached, to pray to God in the great congregation, and then, in the quiet of his home, to think over what he has heard, what he has asked for, what he has promised. So plentifully has God provided for the nurture of our souls in godliness: he has set apart a seventh of our whole lives, ten years out of the age of man, during which we are commanded to abstain

from every other work, that we may give ourselves wholly to the most important of all works, that of learning the way to heaven.

Only remember that these, and all other religious exercises, as they are often called,—and the word is a very fit and proper one,—are to be valued and regarded by us as means, not as ends. The end, the desirable end and object, which we ought all to have in view, is to become holy and godly. But the means, the exercises appointed by our Saviour, whereby we are to become holy and godly, are his sacraments, prayer, public and private, and the reading and teaching of his word. These are the means afforded us for becoming holy and godly: without using these means we cannot become so: by a right use of them we may. Still the means are not the end. The road which leads to London is not London. If a man once gets to confound these two things, and to mistake one for the other,—if he gets to fancy that saying prayers is holiness, that coming to church is godliness,—his error is most dangerous, and, if he is not cured of it, will be deadly. In the case of the road this is plain enough. If you saw a traveller sitting by the roadside, and he told you he was going to London, you would say to him, "This is the road; get up, and walk along; and, if you keep straight on, you will get there in time." So do we, God's ministers, say to all such as have the form of godliness, without the power, to all who come to church, without striving to obey God when they are out of church, to all such we say, "You have the right means, if you would only use them: you have learnt God's will, if you would only endeavour to do it. Practise, practise, practise what you learn: quicken your steps; move onward along the road to heaven; give over slumbering and loitering by the way."

But suppose the traveller, instead of following your ad-

vice, were to say, "No, I shall sit on where I am: for this, you yourself tell me, is the road to London: so, being on the right road, I shall soon get home." Were the traveller to make you such an answer, what would you think? Would not you pity him as crazed in mind? would not you try to rouse him? would not you warn him that the only home he was likely to get to was his last home? that he would soon starve or be frozen to death, if he did not jump up and move on quickly? What then! are you not quite as much to be pitied, do you not quite as much need to be warned, if you persist in the very same mistake about your heavenly journey, and lie motionless, fancying that it is enough to know and see the road, without troubling yourselves to follow it? So far is this from being enough, that better were it to be born a poor ignorant Turk or heathen, better, much better were it for a man never to have seen a church, never to have heard the name of Jesus Christ, than to have all the religious advantages vouchsafed to us Englishmen, if he rests lazily satisfied with the forms of holiness, without endeavouring to obtain the substance. To pray with the lips, if that is all we do, is nothing, and worse than nothing. To pray with the understanding, if that is all we do, is nothing, and worse than nothing. We must pray with the lips and with the understanding, and above all we must pray at the same time with the spirit. And this we cannot do, unless we are in earnest in our prayers, unless our heart is in them, unless we are sincerely striving to abide in God's holy law, and to walk in all his commandments.

XXX.

LITURGY: First Part.

CONFESSION.

Psalm xxxviii. 18.

I will confess my wickedness, and be sorry for my sin.

HAVING already spoken to you about the great necessity and importance of praying with the understanding, that is, of understanding and knowing and thinking what you are saying and asking for in your praises and prayers to God, I shall now try to help you in doing so, by setting before you the general bearing and purport of the service you are accustomed to hear in church, and shall add such remarks on particular prayers, as it may seem to me that you will be the better for. That general bearing and purport you will find it easier to make out, if we divide what is called the Order for Morning Prayer into three parts, including the Litany. The first part begins at the beginning, and ends with the Lord's prayer. This may be called the Confession, the chief thing we do in it being to confess our sins. The second part begins with, "O Lord, open thou our lips!" and goes down to the end of the Belief. This part I would call the Psalms and Lessons: not only because the Psalms, commonly so called, and the chapters chosen

from the Old and New Testament, form far the largest portion of it: the rest of it likewise well deserves the same name. For what is that glorious Te Deum, which we repeat after the first Lesson, but a hymn or psalm, in which we praise God for all the wonderful and glorious works of his almighty power and love? And what is the Belief but a lesson? a lesson of faith, to teach the young, and to remind the older, of the great truths they are to hold to as members of the Church of Christ. The third part, which begins with "Let us pray," and ends with "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,"—is made up of the Collects and the Litany, which may be classed together under the common name of Prayers. These may be regarded as the three main parts of the Morning Service, exclusive of the Communion Service and the Sermon. Each of them has a different subject, a different purport: each has, so to say, a different keynote. The keynote of the first part is repentance: the keynote of the second part is praise: the keynote of the third part is prayer.

What has just been said of the Morning Service, you will easily see, applies to the Evening Service also; which differs from the Morning Service in little else than in having no Litany. Thus you may be enabled to take a sort of bird's-eye view of the whole; and having seen what are the chief limbs or members which make up the body of our Common Prayer, you will be better able to perceive how its various parts hang together, and what is the use and purpose of each, according to the place it fills. Thus too will you find less difficulty in following me while I go through them in detail.

The service opens, you know, with certain sentences of Scripture, one or more of which the minister is to read with a loud voice, that everybody may hear them. These sentences all teach the same truth,—that it is our duty to

confess our sins with our lips, to grieve over them and renounce them with our hearts, and to forsake them in our lives; and they assure us that, if a man do this, God will graciously forgive him, and take him back into favour. This is the great, the most comfortable truth, which these sentences agree in declaring: and because they all agree in declaring the same truth, it is needless for the minister to read more than one or two of them. Did they teach different truths, it might be proper to read them all. But as it is, if a man is only ready to take God at his word, one clear assurance of forgiveness will be enough to set his doubts at rest. Else, if he is not satisfied with the clearness and fullness of the assurance, as he hears it read by the minister, if he wants more than one assurance to quiet his fears in a matter of such great moment, he has all the eleven sentences in his Prayerbook, with a direction to the chapter each comes from: so he has only to take down his Bible, when he gets home, and to turn to the passages. Thus, by comparing scripture with scripture, he may convince himself, that God is indeed gracious and merciful, and ready to forgive and receive the humble and contrite sinner.

You will have no trouble in understanding why this assurance is placed at the very opening of the service. The chief purpose of our coming to church is, or at least ought to be, to pray to God. But to pray to God, unless we believed and knew that God would hear our prayers, would be mere idleness. Therefore are we told that he will hear us, yea that, sinners as we are, he will hear us, and that, if we will confess and repent of our sins, he will pardon us and take us into favour. This is the great thing we need to know: knowing this we may have boldness to offer up our prayers before the throne of grace.

But we will look at these passages a little closer, that you

may understand how full the assurance is which they give us, how plain, how satisfactory, how well fitted for all sorts and conditions of men. The first of them is taken from the 18th chapter of the prophet Ezekiel: "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." Now the natural question for a man to ask, when he hears this sentence read for the first time, is, "Who says this? how does the prophet know this? what authority has he to make such a promise? may I rely upon the truth of it?" I answer, You may: you may rely upon it most safely: for the speaker is God himself. Look at the first verse of the chapter. It begins thus: "The word of the Lord came to me again, saying." For this promise then of eternal life to the wicked who turn away from their wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, we have God's own word. And who can doubt that word? who can think that, though this may have been so formerly, it is not so now? That word, we know, standeth fast for ever.

The same holds of the gracious invitation in the verse from the prophet Joel. That too, if we turn to the passage, we shall find, is ushered in by a declaration, that it comes from God himself. "The day of the Lord (says the prophet) is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? Therefore, also now, saith the Lord, turn ye to me with all your hearts: and rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Here again, you see, we have God's own word, warning us to flee from the wrath to come, and assuring us that, if we do so with hearty sorrow, we shall find that he is gracious and merciful, and full of kindness, and that he will turn away from his anger, and will only visit us with his love.

Perhaps however a man may say: "This may all be very true: God may be ready to show mercy to others: but I am too great a sinner: God cannot forgive me: my offences are so very bad, I am ashamed to confess them before him." What says the Bible to such a man? Are you polluted with worse sins than David's when he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and had sent her husband to be slain by the sword of the children of Ammon? Are your sins worse than adultery and treacherous murder? Yet David turned to God; David confessed his sins; David had courage to pray to God: so should you. This is the reason why the second, third, and fourth of these opening sentences are all taken from the fifty-first Psalm; which was written in the bitterness of David's sorrow, after the prophet Nathan had brought him to a sense of his heinous guilt.

On the other hand, should any one say, "I have nothing to confess or repent of; I never did anybody any harm; I come to church regularly every Sunday; I am quite as good as my neighbours,"—should any one talk in this foolish way,—and this is much the likelier error of the two, inasmuch as a hundred men get entangled in the snares of presumption and self-sufficiency, for one who falls into the pit of despair,—for such presumptuous talkers there is an answer ready in the sentence from the Book of Daniel, which stands next to the one from the prophet Joel: "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, although we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed his voice, to walk in his law, which he set before us." These words form part of the prayer which Daniel offered up, when, to use his own words, he was confessing his sin, and the sin of his people. He then who is purer, who is holier, who is juster, who is more innocent than Daniel was, let him do as he pleases. But let all others be taught by Daniel's example to make confes-

sion and to humble themselves before God. If even he, on searching his life closely, discovered sins to acknowledge and bewail, much more should we find them, if we looked for them, we who are spotted all over with sin; I do not mean, with black and heinous crimes, but with a number of faults and offences, which, though they may seem trifles in the eyes of men, are sinful, and therefore not trifling, in the eyes of God. Such are the many offences of the tongue,—vain talk, idle talk, profane talk, angry talk, spiteful talk. Such again are the many offences of the temper,—hastiness, pettishness, peevishness, fretfulness, ill-humour. Such too are the many kinds of evil thoughts, covetous thoughts, envious thoughts, proud thoughts, lustful thoughts,—those poisonous serpents' eggs, which, if hatched by opportunity, are sure to bring forth evil deeds. Lastly, and above all, such are the whole tribe of our offences against God,—our want of love for him, our never thinking about him, our coldness in his service, our shaping our conduct according to our own fancies, according to what seems good in our own eyes, and not according to his holy law, our being content to do as others do, instead of striving to become perfect as God is perfect, and taking his word for the rule and pattern of our lives. All these offences are sinful in God's eyes: yet I will venture to say, there is not one of the do-no-harm people, who has not been guilty of many of these offences, over and over again, who is not guilty of several of them daily, with the addition perhaps of many foul acts of intemperance, not to speak of things still worse.

Thus, whatever a man's way of life may be, there is something in these sentences to fit his case. Is he plunged in the depths of evil? Let him confess his wickedness, like David, and be sorry for his sin. Is he on the other hand leading an innocent and holy life? Let him search the secret chambers of his heart by the light of God's word, and

then, following the example of holy Daniel, acknowledge the stains he will be sure to discover there. This is the lesson taught us by the sentences of Scripture with which the service opens. Those I have spoken of, you may have observed, are all taken from the Old Testament. For fear however lest this should give rise to any doubts or scruples, three others are added from St. Matthew, St. Luke, and St. John, to shew how completely the New Testament agrees on this head with the Old, and to admonish us that repentance and confession are quite as necessary and quite as profitable to us Christians, as they were to the Jews before our Saviour's coming.

After the minister, by reading one or two of these sentences, has prepared the minds of his congregation for the duties they are met to perform, he goes on to speak to them about those duties in that which is commonly called the Exhortation. Many people seem to fancy that the Exhortation is a prayer, and repeat it after the minister. But this is a mistake. When we pray, we speak to God; whereas the Exhortation is addressed by the minister to the congregation, as everybody may perceive from the words with which it begins. Its purpose is to apply the foregoing texts of Scripture to the circumstances of the congregation, and to exhort or advise them to join in the general Confession which follows. This is the second step in the service. The first was to prove out of the Bible, that it is the duty of every man to confess his sins, to grieve over them, to renounce them, and to forsake them, and that, if he does so, God will pardon him. The second step is to entreat every member of the congregation to apply these steps to himself, and to persuade him if possible, to confess his sins with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, that by so doing he may obtain forgiveness.

Hitherto the congregation have had nothing to do, except to listen to the exhortation of the minister, and to the

declaration of God's gracious mercy. But here their share in the service begins. After the Exhortation, in which the minister has besought them to confess their sins, he repeats the general Confession, in which all present ought to join, kneeling humbly on their knees, each confessing his own sins inwardly from the bottom of his heart. That you may be better prepared for doing this, I would recommend you all to spend ten minutes or so every Sunday morning, before you come to church, in thinking over what you have done in the course of the last week, asking yourselves such questions as these: "Have I prayed to God regularly and heartily during the past week? Have I tried to govern my conduct according to his holy law? Have I been out of temper? Have I used any harsh or violent or bad language, in speaking either to any one or of any one? Have I been unkind to anybody? Have I been merciful to the poor dumb creatures entrusted to my care? Have I set a good example to my household, to my servants, to my children? Have I done my duty to my master faithfully and diligently? Have I gladly taken every opportunity of helping or comforting my neighbour? Have I been guilty of an excess?" Questions of this kind are soon asked; and if a man has an honest, open heart, and does not set about cloaking and excusing his sins, they may soon be answered also. The answer which your accusing conscience makes to any of them, should furnish the matter of your confession. Such of you indeed as have not hitherto accustomed yourselves to this sort of self-examination, will perhaps be shocked and frightened at first at having so great a host of sins to confess, which you have overlooked and taken no thought of; just as a man who has been careless in keeping his accounts, finds to his dismay, when he begins to look into his affairs, that he owes debts upon debts more than he was at all prepared for. But whose fault is that? Surely not the fault

of his honesty in examining into his affairs now, but that of his carelessness in not having examined them long ago. Painful as the examination may have become, from having been put off so long, every day it is put off it will grow more painful and appalling. Whereas, if you set about it steadily and heartily at once, the pain and difficulty will every week grow less. Short accounts, they say, make long friends, even upon earth. Much more will short accounts, such short accounts as I have been recommending to you, make long, yea immortal friends, who will receive you into everlasting habitations.

When a man has thus rubbed and brightened the looking-glass of his conscience before he comes to church, and by examining it carefully has found out all the spots of various kinds which have stained his soul during the week, he will be ready and anxious to bear his part in the general Confession. He will join in it with the spirit: for he will feel the evil of sin, and his need of pardon. He will join in it with the understanding also: for he will know how to apply the different parts of it to his own case. Thus spirit and lips and understanding will unite to offer up a holy and acceptable confession.

But what does the Confession consist of? It begins with a full and entire acknowledgment of our sins,—that "we have erred and strayed from God's ways, like lost sheep." This reminds us of the passage in the prophet Isaiah (liii. 6), where it is said, that "all we, like sheep, have gone astray." Just as your sheep would go astray on the downs, if they were left long together without a shepherd or a dog to take care of them, and would be unable to find their way back to the fold, and the longer they were left to themselves, the further they would stray, so we too, if left to ourselves, are sure to stray; so we do stray day after day, and week after week, and what would become of us unless the voice of the

shepherd sounded in our ears on a Sunday, to call us back to the fold? As Isaiah goes on to say, "We have turned every one to his own way;" or, as it stands in our Prayer-book, "we have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts." We have followed them too much: indeed we follow them too much in following them at all. This is the sin, on account of which the prophet Jeremiah rebukes the Israelites (xviii. 12); because they said, "We will walk after our own devices, and will every one do the imagination of his evil heart." This indeed is the sum and substance of our sinfulness, that we are ever following our own devices, our own desires, instead of the commands of God. Therefore are we for ever offending against God's holy laws. For the root of all evil is our choosing to have a will of our own: and for this reason, whatever we do, so long as our natural will is not broken and slain,—whatever we do, though we ourselves may think it innocent, or even praiseworthy,—is sinful in the sight of God. Thus we ever do what we ought not to do, and leave what we ought to do undone: nor is there any health in us. We cannot of ourselves cure this inborn disease: we cannot crush our will, and bring it into submission to the will of God. This acknowledgment of sin is followed by a supplication for pardon, a supplication grounded, not on any merit or claim of ours, but on God's free mercy, promised to those who confess their sins and are truly penitent, for the sake of Jesus Christ. The whole is then wound up by an entreaty, that, as we have no strength of ourselves to help ourselves, God will vouchsafe for the sake of Jesus Christ to give us his Holy Spirit, so that we may be enabled to live soberly, righteously, and godly, to the glory of his holy name.

You see how much there is in this Confession, and therefore how great need there is that you should come to it with all your faculties alive and awake. Perhaps it may help

you to understand it better, if I translate it into other words, and try to bring out its meaning a little more fully. The substance of it might be expressed pretty nearly in the following manner:

O God our heavenly Father, we know thy great power, and dread it; for we have sinned in many ways against thee. But we also know thy great mercy; and in this we put our only hope, this is our only comfort. We are thy chosen people, thy flock, even as the Jews were of old: but like them we have strayed from thy fold, and have forsaken the path of thy commandments. Thou hast given us thy word to guide us: but we have left it to walk after our own fancies, and to work out our own conceits. Some of us have given up our souls to the cares of this world: some of us have been led aside and ensnared by the deceitfulness of riches: some of us have run headlong after shameful and forbidden pleasures. Our hearts sink within us at the thought of our disobedience; and our souls are faint with the sickness of sin. But thou, O Lord, art merciful: spare us, we beseech thee, although we deserve nothing but punishment. As thou didst promise by the prophet Jeremiah (xxx. 17), that thou wouldst restore health to thy servant Jacob, and wouldst heal him of his wounds, so restore our souls to health, and heal them of their deadly wounds, and take us back into thy favour. Thou hast promised forgiveness through thy dear Son to all who turn to thee with true repentance. For his sake, and for thy word's sake, forgive us, who now desire to come back to thee. Increase and perfect our repentance; and grant us thy grace, that we may leave all our evil ways, and may keep henceforth in the right path, walking in holiness and piety before thee, in justice and charity toward our neighbour, and in temperance and purity within ourselves, that so we may please thee both in will and deed unto the end of our lives.

Thus much at least is contained in the Confession, when taken in its full meaning. After a confession of this sort, how consoling and comfortable ought the Absolution to be which the priest, as God's messenger, announces and proclaims to you! It is indeed the most delightful part of a minister's duty, to declare the glad tidings of forgiveness to those who are sorrowing for sin, and, as the Scripture expresses it, to bind up the wounds of the broken-hearted. Our office at times is painful: for at times we have to find fault and reprove. But in the Absolution we have a different and a joyful task. We are to declare and make known to all Christians, that their sins are loosed, and that God has pardoned them, provided they are truly penitent; that is, provided they forsake their sins, and keep God's holy commandments, and do that which is lawful and right. Else the pardon proclaimed by the minister is of no effect. The impenitent have no share in it. They continue unforgiven, and are still under God's wrath.

After the congregation and the minister have been reconciled to God by the Confession, and after the glad tidings of forgiveness have been proclaimed, the minister and the people join in offering up the Lord's prayer. Thus we are brought to the end of the first of the three parts, into which the Morning Service may be divided. Of that most perfect form of words, which in a few short petitions sums up whatever man can want, or ought to wish for, I shall not speak at present. I must keep it for a course of sermons by itself.

XXXI.

LITURGY: Second Part.

PSALMS AND LESSONS.

Psalm cl. 6.

Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.

THE first part of the Morning Service, we have seen, is a service of contrition and humiliation, in which we humble ourselves before God, confessing our many sins against him, entreating his pardon for the past, and beseeching him for the sake of Jesus Christ to help us to live better lives in future. Its keynote, as I have already said, is penitence. In the sentences at the beginning we are required to repent. In the Exhortation you are told to confess your sins with a humble, penitent heart. In the Confession we pray God to spare those who confess, and to restore them that are penitent. Lastly, in the Absolution forgiveness of sins is declared to all christian people who are truly penitent. The second part of the Morning Service on the other hand, the Psalms and Lessons, is a service of praise and instruction. Its purpose is to teach the people what they should believe and do, and to enable them to join the minister in praising God for all his mercies. Its keynote is praise. It begins with a short prayer on the

part of the minister, that God will open our lips, so that we may be able to praise him: and this is followed by a promise on the part of the people, that if their lips are thus opened, they will shew forth his praise. When we confess our sins, we are to fall on our knees as though we were sinking under the burden of them: but now the nobleness of the subject lifts us up, and we rise to give glory to the eternal Trinity, through all time, past, present, and to come. Hereupon the minister exhorts the people to praise the Lord, and the people reply, "The Lord's name be praised." And praised the Lord is through this whole part of the service, in many various ways, by our praising him, by our giving thanks to him, by our glorifying him, by our telling out his works with gladness, by our setting forth the wonders of his providence, and the still greater wonders of his grace.

In the first place the minister and the people stir up one another, as the Jews did of old, by the 95th Psalm, to lift up their voices in the praise of the Lord, and to shew forth their joy "in the strength of their salvation." And who is that? Who can it be but Christ? Christ is our Saviour and our strength: through him we are forgiven and made whole. Therefore, as the lame man, spoken of in the Acts, who had been lying asking alms at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, when his ancle-bones had received strength through the name of Jesus, stood up and praised God, so do we, when we are raised up from our knees, on which we have been craving the alms of God's forgiveness, stand and praise Jesus, the strength of our salvation, in acknowledgment that through him alone can we resist the temptations of the devil in this world, or his malicious accusations at the last day. We are to praise him, and to come before his presence with thanksgiving. The presence of Jehovah among the Jews dwelt between the cherubim in the Temple. The same

presence, though invisible, still dwells in Christ's church. For so our Lord expressly promised (Matt. xviii. 20): "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Does any one wish to be in the presence of Christ? Let him come to church. Only when we are here, let us be duly grateful to God for his great loving-kindness in deigning to dwell among us, and to hearken to our praises and prayers. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hands are all the corners of the earth; and the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands prepared the dry land." Here is the reason for our thanksgiving and rejoicing. Our God is not like the idol gods of the heathens, who have eyes, yet see not, and ears, yet hear not, and in whose nostrils there is no breath. These are all false gods, gods of a man's making: but our Lord is the true God, the great God, the only God, the God who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in heaven, and all that is in the earth, and all that is in the sea: and all these things are still in his hand: as his breath in the beginning called them into being, so but for his upholding word they crumble away into nothingness.

But it is not enough to praise God, and to rejoice in him; we must also worship and fall down and kneel before him. For "he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand." He is our God, not merely as he is the God of all the rest of the world, but in a more especial manner: for he has graciously entered into a covenant with us, that he should be our God, and we should be his people. Nor are we his people only, but his sheep; a beautiful image to shew how he watches over us and tends us. We are Christ's flock: he has pur-

chased us with his blood; he feeds us with his word; he refreshes us with his Holy Spirit in the fair and pleasant pastures of godliness. Thus the prophet Isaiah foretold of him (xl. 11), "that he should feed his flock like a shepherd, and should gather the lambs with his arm, and should carry them in his bosom, and should gently lead those that were with young." This leading and gathering with his arm, this carrying the young in his bosom, this gentle leading of the feeble, this constant succour and support which our Lord affords to his people, to each according to his need, is expressed in the declaration that we are the sheep of his hand.

Hitherto all in this Psalm has been gladness and thankful rejoicing. But God knows how apt unmixed joy is to get into men's heads: he knows how ready we all are to feed ourselves with hopes, and to take the promises of the Bible to ourselves, without considering whether they belong to us. Yet we have no share in them, so long as we continue in sin. Therefore, at the end of the Psalm, to sober us a little, and call us back to safe thoughts, we have a few most wholesome words of caution: "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works." That is to say, when God calls you, when he commands you to do anything, or to leave anything undone, do not harden your hearts against his bidding, as the Jews did in the days of Moses, time after time in the wilderness, murmuring at every hardship they had to bear, shewing their want of faith in God, notwithstanding all the wonderful mercies and deliverances they had received, and forsaking the true God, who had poured forth so many blessings upon them, to go astray after the false and bloodthirsty and lustful gods of the nations. For a long time God bore with them. "Forty

years long was he grieved with that generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their hearts; for they have not known my ways." But at last the day of grace closed, and the day of punishment began: at last God sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. This was when the children of Israel were in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh: and the story, as we find it in the 14th chapter of the Book of Numbers, is so instructive, that, as that chapter is not read among the Sunday lessons, I shall tell it you at some length.

After the law had been given on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel removed from thence, and journeyed on toward the land which God had promised them. When they were near the edge of the wilderness, on the borders of the promised land, Moses sent twelve men to spy out the land, and to bring back word what they saw there. So these men went up and searched the land; and after being absent forty days they came back, and told the children of Israel, that the land was very rich, and abounded with the fruits of the earth, and flowed, as it were, with milk and honey; but that the inhabitants were strong and warlike, that some of them were giants, and that they dwelt in great cities with high walls to them, which there was no hope of scaling or beating down. One might have thought that reports of this kind should not have frightened a people who had the Lord for their God. They had witnessed his wonders in Egypt: they had been brought out safe from Pharaoh and all his host: they had passed through the Red Sea as on dry land: they had seen Moses call for water from the hard rock: they had been fed from heaven with manna and quails: they had heard the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire when he gave the ten commandments, and had lived. Surely after so many proofs of God's power and goodness, the Israelites might have trusted that he, who had

already done such great things for them, would not desert them at the last ; surely they might have gone on boldly at the bidding of the Lord of Hosts. But no: their hearts sank within them at these tidings : they said, "Would God we had died in the land of Egypt ! or would God we had died in this wilderness ! Wherefore hath the Lord brought us to this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us choose a captain, and let us return into Egypt!" It was in vain that those lion-hearted men, Joshua and Caleb, who had been among the twelve spiers of the land, said to the children of Israel : "The land is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then will he bring us into this land, and give it us. Only rebel not against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land : for they are bread for us : their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us : fear them not." Instead of listening to these brave and good men, the Israelites waxed furious at being thus crossed and opposed. From stubbornness and rebellion they went on to brutal violence, and, as cowards usually do, to cruelty: for cowardice is a very cruel thing; nine times in ten, as any soldier who has been in the wars will tell you, cowardice and cruelty go together: and the most cowardly men are generally the cruellest. So was it with those wicked cowardly Israelites. Though they were afraid of going forth to meet their enemies face to face in battle, they were not afraid of shedding blood : they were not afraid of committing murder, when they fancied that the strength of numbers was on their side. Because Joshua and Caleb joined with Moses and Aaron in exhorting them to obey God, they all cried out, "Stone them ;" and doubtless they were preparing to do so. Now learn a lesson from these Israelites. Often as they had disobeyed God, and murmured against him, yet

up to that time the door of mercy was still open to them. If they had not hardened their hearts, and shut their ears against the words of Caleb and Joshua,—if they had had the wisdom to see and believe that the Lord, who had shewn himself almighty against the Egyptians, must be equally almighty against the Canaanites,—if in the strength of this wisdom they had obeyed the will of God, and gone up to battle boldly,—all would have been well with them: they would have been forgiven; the Lord of Hosts would have been with them; their arms would have prospered, and their enemies would have been overthrown. But they did close their ears: they did harden their hearts; they did persist in disobeying God, and were about to slay his servants. Mark the consequences. The door of mercy was closed upon them: the cup of wrath was filled to overflowing: they were condemned to perish in the wilderness. "The glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle before all the children of Israel. And the Lord said: Because all these men, who have seen my glory, and my miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness, have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice, surely they shall not see the land which I promised to their fathers; none of them that provoked me shall see it. Their carcases shall fall in the wilderness: there they shall be consumed; and there they shall die!" And so it came to pass. There they did all die, all save Caleb and Joshua. Out of that vast multitude of men and women, who came with Moses out of Egypt, Joshua and Caleb alone lived to see the promised land: because they alone had trusted heartily in the Lord, and had followed him, and obeyed him. This, my brethren, is the story of God's fearful judgment against the stiffnecked and hardened Jews, which we are reminded of every Sunday morning in the 95th Psalm, lest we too should harden our hearts against God's promises and warn-

ings as they did, and should be afraid of fighting against God's enemies, and our enemies, sin, and the devil, and so, being guilty of the same offence, should be visited in the end with the same punishment. For we too have a promised land: we too have a place of rest prepared for us, beyond the labours and dangers of the wilderness of this world, on the other side of the grave, in heaven. That is our promised land: let us be careful not to miss it by hardness of heart and unbelief. Let us beware of provoking God to swear that we shall not enter into his eternal rest.

After the 95th Psalm come the Psalms for the day. Sunday after Sunday we repeat some portion of those beautiful Psalms, which are so full of piety, so full of trust in God and in his goodness, so full of promises to the poor and needy. It was only last Sunday that my heart leapt within me, as we were reading the 34th Psalm together, to think how blessed are the people in this country to have such words of comfort read to them in their own tongue. In other books I have read of God's caring for the great, or for the just: but the Bible, and books taken from the Bible, alone speak of God as caring for the poor. This is a mark which belongs solely to our religion, and which separates it from all false ones. Christ came to preach the Gospel to the poor. God is the God, not of the rich only, but still more, if possible, of the poor. In a word, the Bible is the poor man's book; and it especially behoves every poor man to take care that his children learn to read it. But if there be one part of the Bible more plentifully crowded with promises to the godly poor than another, it is the Book of Psalms. "The poor crieth, and the Lord heareth him, and saveth him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord tarrieth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see how gracious the Lord is! Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. O fear the Lord, ye that

are his saints: for they that fear him lack nothing. The lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good." These beautiful verses,—and there are several more like them,—are taken out of that single 34th Psalm. Nor are the Psalms read straight through to you by the minister; you yourselves are called on to join in them, and to read them with him; you have the high privilege assigned to you of praising God in his holy place, by uttering the sweet words of David with your own lips.

The next part of the service is the Lessons, in the course of which the most important chapters of the Old Testament, and nearly half of the New Testament, are read to you every year. These the minister is particularly ordered to read distinctly with an audible voice, standing, and turning so as he may best be heard by all who are present. From this you may see how anxious our Church is, that you should hear the word of God. For myself, there is no part of my office in church that I feel more delight in, or that I take greater pains to perform, as well as I can, than this of reading the word of God to you in such a way that you may understand it. The only thing I ask in return is, that, so long as I take pains to read, you will also take pains to listen. And God grant that both my reading and your listening may work together, through the blessing of the Holy Ghost, to build up your heart and mine in the knowledge of God's law, in dutifulness to his will, and in faith and love toward the Father and the Son, strong enough to preserve us against all the assaults of the Evil One!

Between the two Lessons comes the Te Deum, so called because the Latin hymn, from which it is translated, begins with those two words. Of this most noble christian song of praise I hardly dare speak; for I feel how unable I am

to set forth its excellences worthily. It opens with a grand chorus, in which heaven and earth, the apostles, the prophets, the martyrs, the holy Church throughout the world join in worshipping God, in glorifying, and in praising him. This is to shew us that our God is not the God of this earth merely, and of those who are now living upon it, but that he is the God whom it has been the joy of the faithful in all former ages to acknowledge and adore,—that he is the God of the heavens, yea of the heaven of heavens, just as much as of the earth,—that he is the God to whom the cherubim and seraphim, that is, all the various orders of angels, are for ever lifting up their songs and praises,—that he is the holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth. But what, you may ask, is the meaning of the Lord of Sabaoth? These words amount to just the same thing with the Lord of Hosts, as you may see by turning to the 9th chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle tells us that "Esaias said, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like to Gomorrah." For these words which are taken from the 1st chapter of Isaiah, stand in our translation as follows: "Except the Lord of Hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like to Gomorrah." The Lord God of Sabaoth then is the Lord God of Hosts. And who is the Lord of Hosts? Who is this God, whom all created things bow down to, and all the blessed spirits worship and obey? The next verses tell us: "He is the Father of an infinite majesty:" He is "his honourable, true, and only Son:" He is "the Holy Ghost, the Comforter." He is the one eternal God, who is revealed to us in holy Scripture under the mystery of three persons, as the Father that made us, the Son that has redeemed us, and the Holy Ghost that sanctifies us, if we are inwardly, as we are outwardly, the chosen people of God.

After this tribute of praise and worship to the ever-blessed Trinity, the Te Deum addresses itself more especially to that person of the Trinity to whom we, poor sinful men, are so particularly bound for all he has done and suffered for us,—that is, to our Lord Jesus Christ. To him it speaks as follows: "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man, thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Thou sittest at the right hand of God, in the glory of the Father. We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge." In these words we are reminded of the chief proofs and instances of Christ's goodness toward us. We are told that he is the King of Glory, and the everlasting Son of the Father,—that is to say, that he was begotten of the Father before all worlds. Before the earth and the sun and the heavens, before the angels were created, before anything that is had life or being, the everlasting Son dwelt in the bosom of the Father, sharing in all his glory, and full of his wisdom and power. Yet, though he was so high above all beings, he humbled himself, and, in order that he might deliver us, did not abhor the Virgin's womb, but became man for our sakes, being made in all things like as we are, sin alone excepted: and having lived a life of pain on earth, after overcoming the sharpness of death on the cross, he opened the gates of heaven for his people, and now sits at the right hand of God, continually making intercession for them, as he will do, until he returns in great glory, to judge both the quick and the dead. At that awful day we shall have to appear before him as our Judge. Well then does it behove us to consider how we are to fit ourselves for that day of terror. The Te Deum shows us this too. The thought of that day should awaken us to fervent

prayer. No sooner has it confessed its belief in Christ as our Judge, than it changes its tone from praise to prayer, and goes on: "We therefore pray thee, help thy servants, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood." For thine own sake help us. Let not thy sufferings have been endured, let not thy blood have been shed in vain; let not all that thou hast done for us be of no avail to us: but as thou hast done so much, even to the shedding of thy precious blood, for our sakes, assist us that we may obtain the benefits purchased for us by thy cross and passion, and make us to be numbered among thy saints in glory everlasting. To that end continue to preserve thy people, continue to bless thy heritage. Be thou our Governor, our only Master and Lord; and, forasmuch as without thee we are unable to stand, do thou lift up and uphold us. So may we magnify thee day by day, and worship thy name ever world without end. In order however that we may attain to all these blessed privileges, it is necessary that we should be without sin, that we should be pure and holy. But pure and holy we cannot be of ourselves: we cannot keep ourselves without sin. Even for this one day we cannot keep ourselves without sin. Do thou therefore vouchsafe to keep us this one day without sin. Of thy free mercy keep us: we have no claim upon thee, but thy mercy. Let thy mercy lighten upon us: for that is our only trust. And inasmuch as we place our whole and sole trust in thee, O Lord, let us never be confounded.

After the Te Deum the second Lesson is read to you. While the first Lesson, as you know, is always chosen out of the Old Testament, the second Lesson is taken from the New Testament, in the morning from one of the Gospels, or from the Book of Acts, in the evening from one of the Epistles. The Gospels tell us what our Saviour said and did and suffered. The Book of Acts sets forth how quickly

and marvellously the religion of Christ spread over the earth, and what mighty things God brought to pass by means of the holy apostles, within the first thirty years after our Lord ascended into heaven. The Epistles are letters written by those apostles, declaring the truths which the Spirit of all truth had revealed to them, the truths which they went about the world preaching, which they sealed with their blood, and on the foundation of which they built up the Church of Christ. All these blessed words are read to you in your own tongue, so that even those who cannot read themselves, may yet hear and understand the great things which Christ has done for the salvation of mankind, and may know him in whom they are to believe.

Well indeed, after hearing the glad tidings of salvation thus declared to us in our own tongue, may we all unite in praising God, and giving thanks to him, and calling upon all lands to rejoice in him, and to serve him with gladness. For now that he is reconciled to mankind in Christ, they who are thus reconciled to him may in truth serve him with gladness, not in the spirit of fear as the heathens serve their gods, but in the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, and are enabled to love God, as children love their father.

This second part of the service is then closed by the minister and people joining in repeating what is called the Apostles' Creed, which contains a short and simple summary of the chief truths a Christian is to believe. Of this Creed the time will not permit me to speak to you now. Indeed there is so much matter in every line of it, that it requires a course of sermons to itself: and such a course I purpose to preach to you hereafter, if God allows me to remain among you.*

* This purpose was not fulfilled.

XXXII.

LITURGY: THIRD PART.

COLLECTS AND LITANY.

PHIL. iv. 6.

In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

THE third part of the Morning Service, as I said before, has also a keynote of its own. As the keynote of the first part is repentance and humiliation, and turns on the necessity of a humble and contrite heart,—while the keynote of the second part is praise,—the keynote of the third part is prayer. It is made up of the Collects and the Litany: which may both be classed together under the common name of prayers. For prayers they both are, only under different forms. In the Collects the congregation offers up its prayers *collectively*, or in a body, through the minister, who is the spokesman or mouthpiece of the people, and who, in presenting their petitions, *collects* or binds together their wants and wishes, and sums them up in a few words. The Litany on the other hand is a general supplication, in which the congregation are to speak for themselves, and bear their part by means of the different responses. The minister numbers up the various blessings of every kind which are most desirable for Christ's people; and

then the people pray to God that he will grant all those blessings. But whatever differences there may be between the Collects and the Litany in point of form, there is no difference in point of substance. They are like two roads. The Collects are a path where only one can walk abreast, and where the minister is to lead the way. The Litany is a public road wide enough for all the people. But both roads lead to the same place,—to God's mercy-seat: and both are travelled along for the same purpose, to seek and bring down blessings.

This third part of the Morning Service begins, after the minister and people have wound up the second part by calling down God's blessing on each other,—the third part, I say, or the service of prayer, begins with an exhortation from the minister to pray. Hereupon both the minister and the people cry to Christ for mercy, and then join in repeating the Lord's Prayer, which I hope by God's grace to speak of fully some other time. The Lord's Prayer is followed by a few short petitions, which are to be repeated in turns by the minister and the people, and which in a short compass embrace the sum and substance of most of the blessings we ought to pray for. These are in the first place mercy and salvation: then the safety and welfare of the Sovereign. Then we pray that the ministers of the Church may be clothed in righteousness, to the end that they may show forth the truth of the Gospel, not only with their lips, but in their lives; and next that all God's chosen people may have joy in him from whom alone all true joy comes. Lastly we pray for peace, for purity of heart, and for the continual presence of the Holy Spirit. Happy indeed are the people who are in such a case! Happy are the people to whom the Lord gives the blessings of peace,—whose sovereign is holy and prosperous,—whose ministers are faithful and godly,—and who have salvation granted to them in its

truest sense, being saved, not from the curse and condemnation of the law only, but from sin, from sinful habits, from sinful acts, from sinful passions, from sinful wishes; so that they are truly become God's chosen people and their hearts are thoroughly cleansed, as befits the temples of the Holy Ghost. For this is what those who are in Christ are, this is what we ought to be, temples of the Holy Ghost: and therefore do we pray to God that he will make clean our hearts within us, so that there may be nothing unholy, or foul, or unseemly, or profane in them, nothing that may provoke him to take his Holy Spirit from us.

After these sentences,—which, like the overture or beginning of a piece of music, are meant to bring the minds of the congregation into tune, and to prepare them for what follows,—we come to the three Collects, the proper Collect for the day, the Collect for peace, and the Collect for grace, to be repeated, the Prayerbook directs, "all kneeling." This leads me to say a few words on our good old practice of kneeling, which in former times prevailed generally, but which in these days is very much left off in most country congregations. Now do not misunderstand me. I know, as well as you do, that God can hear a man when he is sitting or standing, just as well as when he is kneeling. I know too, that, owing to the scanty room allotted to the poor in many churches, and particularly from the narrowness of the galleries, kneeling may often be very difficult, or nearly impossible. All these allowances I am willing to make to you. But then you in your turn must make some allowances to me. You must allow, that, when there are two ways of doing a thing,—a better way and a worse,—a wise man will choose the better. You must allow, too, that there are many things of no real consequence in themselves, which become of consequence from being the appointed marks of respect and reverence, or of the contrary. For

example, if the king were to come into this country, and any of you wanted to present a petition to him, the king could receive the petition from you just as well, whether your heads were covered or uncovered. Yet not a man amongst you would think of speaking to the king with his hat on. Why so? For this plain reason: because pulling off one's hat is in this country the way of shewing respect and honour to our superiors. Now kneeling holds the same place in our duty to God, as standing bareheaded holds in our duty to the king. It is the appointed way of shewing reverence to him: it is the natural posture of humility and submission: and the man who does not do it, unless he has some good excuse, fails in paying God the bodily worship and outward reverence due to him. It is true, the worship of the body is nothing, and worse than nothing, unless it be accompanied by the worship of the soul. But it is equally true that the worship of the soul is imperfect and unseemly, and wanting in proper lowliness, unless it be accompanied by the worship of the body. The two should go together, as they do in the 95th Psalm; where we are exhorted to worship and fall down and kneel before the Lord our Maker. Thus we read of holy Daniel, just before he was thrown into the den of lions, that he kneeled on his knees, and prayed. Again we read of St. Paul, that, when he had taken leave of the elders at Ephesus in his farewell sermon at Miletus, he kneeled down and prayed with them all. But what need is there to set before you such examples as these, when St. Luke tells us of our Saviour himself, that he kneeled down and prayed? Shall the Son of God himself kneel when he prays? and shall we not kneel? Therefore I would advise the young and healthy,—of the old and infirm I say nothing; for I wish not to make the service of God, which ought to be a comfort and delight, a burthen to any,—but the young and active and healthy I would advise

to accustom themselves to kneel during the prayers, just as they stand during the Psalms, and sit during the Lessons. So behaving, they will do what is seemly and right.

But to return to the Collects: the first Collect, you know, changes every Sunday: so that, with those for Christmas day and Ash Wednesday, and the three for Good Friday, you have nearly sixty different Collects read to you in the course of the year. One or two of them here and there may seem somewhat difficult, owing to the changes that have taken place in the meaning of words since they were written: but for the most part they are very easy and short, much to the purpose, and exceedingly beautiful: and I believe it would be hard to find the same number of holy thoughts and fitting petitions anywhere else expressed in so few words.

The second Collect, that for Peace, is repeated every Sunday: so I shall go through it sentence by sentence, not merely to teach you its full meaning, but also to shew you how much more there is in the prayers than we have any notion of, till we come to look at them closely. The greatest part of this prayer is easy enough. Suppose it stood thus: "O God, who art the author of peace, and lover of concord, defend us, thy humble servants, in all assaults of our enemies, that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ, our Lord." This, we should all see at once, would be a petition to God to give us the great blessing of outward peace, and to defend us from all the adversaries of peace, that is, from all who set their faces against peace, whether at home or abroad. This too is undoubtedly one of the things that we ask of God in this prayer. But this cannot be all: or what would be the meaning of the words which I left out in reading it over just now?—"in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom." These words, it is plain, have nothing to do with outward

peace: so they warn us to look deeper into the Collect, and to understand it as a prayer, not only for outward peace from worldly enemies, but also for that outward peace which leads to eternal life. Having thus got the key to the meaning of this Collect, let us try to unlock it, and to see what treasures it contains. It begins, "O God, who art the author of peace!" And so he is. God is the author of peace as opposed to war. But still more is he the author of peace of mind, as opposed to those inward fightings and distractions, which disturb and rend the unregenerate heart, making it like a den of serpents and wild beasts, full of everything that is venomous and fierce and mischievous. All these things God by his grace casts out of the heart, just as Jesus Christ, when he was on earth, used to cast the devils out of the men who were possessed by them: and by so doing he gives us peace. But God is not only the author of peace: he is also the lover of concord. And what is that? Concord is a very expressive word, signifying the meeting and joining of hearts. Where heart goes along with heart, and each man's heart is with his fellow, and there is no bickering, or envying, or grudging, or division of any sort, but all the people is of one heart and one mind,—there, and there alone, is true concord. This concord God is said to love; because it betokens happiness among his creatures, and brings them more and more to the knowledge of him, "whom to know is eternal life." For the only road to a perfect knowledge of God is through faith in Christ and brotherly love. Other road beside this there is none to that perfect and practical knowledge, which alone can lead to life eternal. But what are the signs of this concord? One sign, and one beginning of it, is peace of heart on earth: and this cannot be enjoyed, until the Spirit of God has wrought in us a hearty trust in God's mercy, and has broken the chains in which sin held us, and given us a new nature, a nature of humility, in which men rejoice to

serve Christ, the Ransomer and Saviour of the world. This service may indeed be said to be perfect freedom: for the servants of God are free. They are not slaves, nor hirelings: they work not out of fear, from compulsion, nor for wages. But they are sons, and work like sons, regularly and steadily, on their heavenly Father's farm, being up and about his business early and late, and doing, remember, far more work than any slave would do, because their hearts are in their work. These are the servants whom Christ loves, and whom he will invite to sit at meat with him, when he comes to his harvest-home. But it is not enough that our eternal life standeth in the knowledge of God; it is not enough that his service is perfect freedom: so frail is our nature that these thoughts have not enough power to bring us to know God and to serve him. In spite of all this we turn away from him, and walk after the lusts of the flesh. Therefore, knowing the cunning, the activity, the malice, of the spiritual foes who are banded against our peace, we pray for defence to the author of peace, that our trust may be in the defence which he vouchsafes to his people, instead of confiding, as too many do, in our own wisdom, or in our own valour, or in our own strength. The Christian knows that, apart from God's assistance, his own strength is the veriest weakness. But he knows likewise how it is in man's weakness that God is pleased to shew forth his strength. Therefore he takes good heart, and is free from all fear of his adversaries, knowing that he who is on our side is greater than they who are against us.

Hence you may see that, if we were to unroll the meaning which is wrapt up in this little prayer, and to spread it out at length, it would run pretty much as follows.

O God, who givest peace to man, and makest thy people to be of one mind, send peace and quiet to this nation. End all the jarrings and fightings, and quarrels, and

divisions, which shake the heart of the country to pieces. O Lord, thou hast fenced us about, and guarded us more than any other people from the assaults of all our enemies abroad: guard us now, we beseech thee, from ourselves,—from our angry passions, from our unruly appetites, from covetousness, which is idolatry before thee, and which, as thy apostle, St. James, teaches us, engenders hatred and bloodshed among men. Make the rich among us compassionate and bountiful, according to the abundance of their means: make the poor obedient and contented. But above all things give us thy peace, that peace which the world cannot give, the peace which springs from the knowledge that we are reconciled to thee through thy Son Jesus Christ, and that he by his death and resurrection has opened the gates of life to us. Fill us with thankful love toward thee for these thy mercies, that we may feel the glorious liberty of thy service, and may do thy will during our stay on earth, like dutiful children, heartily and diligently. But thy service, O Lord, is a warfare: and we, thy servants, are living here on earth, as in some besieged city, open to the assaults of many enemies. Save us, O Saviour, from their malice: and as thou didst deliver thy prophet Elisha, when he was compassed about in Dothan by the hosts of the kings of Syria, so deliver us who are now encompassed by the fury and the wiles of Satan. Make us so to feel that thou art a sure help, that our minds may not faint nor fear, nor our hearts be disquieted within us: so that, enjoying the steadfastness of faith, as well as the quiet of peace and concord, and the tranquillity of a conscience void of offence, we may in all things have peace, O Lord, our God.

From this enlargement of the Collect for Peace, you may learn how to enlarge and apply the petitions in the other prayers. These petitions, I need scarcely observe, must be general; that is, they must be so drawn up and expressed as

to suit the feelings and the situations of a great number and variety of persons. It must be left for each person, and it is the business and duty of each, to apply these general petitions to his own particular wants. With regard to some of the Collects there may perhaps be a difficulty in doing this. But in the Litany it is easy. One of the great advantages of the Litany is, that it goes into details, and mentions one after another, almost every blessing temporal and spiritual which man can be in need of. Moreover there is scarcely any class of persons, however high or low, from the king on his throne to the captive in the dungeon, who is not especially recommended to God's mercy in it. You should attend to this: as each of these petitions is offered up to God in turn, you should ask his favour for the particular person whom the words may bring into your mind. A common instance will make my meaning plain. We pray God that it may please him to preserve all that travel by land or by water. Here is a large class of persons, exposed to dangers of divers kinds, whom we specially recommend to God's mercy. Now a pious Christian will not allow these words to be repeated in his hearing, without thinking of their meaning. Has he a relation or a friend in far countries, exposed to the perils of foreign climates? has he a brother on the wide sea? he will think of that relation, of that friend, of that brother, and will beg a blessing on him in his heart, while the minister is repeating the words. This is what I meant when I exhorted you to apply the general petitions of the Church-prayers each to your own particular case.

After the Litany comes the general Thanksgiving, which in like manner I would have every one apply to his own case, by giving thanks to God in his heart for any particular blessings that may have been vouchsafed to him or to his during the past week. For instance, if I may speak of my-

self, you cannot suppose that, when I read the Thanksgiving to you last Sunday, it did not call up in my mind a grateful sense of God's mercy, in having kept us free from fire, while there have been so many burnings on all sides, in having saved this parish from becoming the scene of murder, and in having preserved my neighbour's life and my own a few days before from the danger that threatened them. If I had not felt gratitude for such mercies, my heart must have been harder than a stone.

In this Thanksgiving the first thing that strikes us is the lowliness of tone that runs through it. We begin by calling ourselves God's "unworthy servants," thereby confessing that we know ourselves to be undeserving of the least of all his mercies. We give him "humble," as well as "hearty thanks:" and then, after mentioning a few of the chief proofs of God's goodness and loving-kindness to us, we turn our thanksgiving into a prayer. We are not contented, like the Pharisee in the parable, with giving God thanks; but, knowing how imperfect our very best thanks are, and how apt our thankfulness is to wax cold, we beseech God to give us a due sense of his mercies, and to make us unfeignedly thankful, in order that we may offer him the only return which he requires and values, the return of a life given up to his service, and spent in holiness and righteousness, —that is, in the faithful and steady performance of all our duties both to God and to man.

This lowliness and humility is the first thing I would have you remark in the general Thanksgiving. The next is the nature of the mercies for which we desire to be made so truly thankful. The blessings of our natural and bodily life, such as our having been brought into being, and kept alive unto this day,—great and wonderful as these gifts are, and clearly as they bear witness to God's protecting care,—are passed over in a few words. What the prayer teaches us to

dwell on "above all," is the inestimable, that is, the countless love,—the love concerning which we can only know that it is far above knowledge,—which God has shewn in saving the world by sending his only Son to die for us. This is the first of the three blessings we are "above all" to be thankful for. The second is "the means of grace," or the help which God has promised us toward doing his will by sending us the Holy Ghost. Without this second blessing, the first would have been nearly useless. For Christ came to redeem unto himself—mark whom?—not sinners,—not persons walking as others walk, after their own idle fancies, or after the customs of the world: he came to redeem unto himself "a peculiar people zealous of good works." (Tit. ii. 14.) So that, if we had not the means of performing these good works granted to us,—seeing that, owing to our corrupt nature, we cannot do them of ourselves,—we should indeed be in an evil strait: and Christ's death would profit us as little, as the healing waters of Bethesda profited the impotent man, who had no one to put him into them. But now God has given us the means of grace, by sending us his Holy Spirit: and every one who prays to him heartily for help, will in course of time find himself strengthened to work the works of God. Lastly, we are to bless and praise God for setting before us the hope of glory, for calling us poor worms, the children of the dust, to an eternal inheritance in the heavens,—an inheritance which he came down to earth on purpose to place within our reach, if we will only throw aside our evil habits, and go straightforward and lay hold on it.

These three gifts, the gift of his Son, the gift of the Holy Ghost, the gift of eternal life, are indeed such unspeakable benefits, that to praise them would require an angel's tongue. But something to prove our sense of them we may all do. We may prove our thankfulness for Christ's death, by eschew-

ing sin on account of which he died. We may prove our thankfulness for the means of grace, by diligently using all the lesser means of grace, such as prayer, at church, and at home, the study of the Scriptures, above all, the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, all which means in this favoured land are so abundantly vouchsafed to every one. Lastly, we may shew forth and prove our thankfulness for the hope of glory, by pressing forward to obtain it, with all humility, patience, and perseverance. May God give you that hope, strengthen it, and fulfil it!

What I had to say to you on the Morning Service of our Church, is now brought to a close. Would that it might enable some of you at least to discern the spirit of that admirable service more clearly than you did before! that it might lead you to understand it better, might give you a truer notion of its exceeding fulness, and shew you how to use it, and to apply it each to his own wants and needs! I began by trying to convince you of the duty of praying with the spirit, as becomes Christians, and at the same time of praying with the understanding, as becomes reasonable beings. With the same exhortation I will conclude. Always pray with the spirit: always pray with the understanding. Study the prayers and services of the Church: think well and often of their meaning: listen to them; join in them; read them; offer them up to God from the bottom of your hearts. So will God hear your prayers, and grant them in the way that he knows to be best for you. He will bring you in this world to the knowledge of his truth, and in the world to come will give you life everlasting.

XXXIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: First Part.

THE ADDRESS.

Luke xi. 2.

He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven.

THE chapter from which these words are taken, begins as follows. "It came to pass that, as Jesus was praying, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him,—Lord, teach us to pray. And he said to them, When ye pray say, —Our Father, which art in heaven." The same, or nearly the same prayer,—for two or three words in it are different, —is given by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount. Nor is this at all surprising: for, seeing that our Saviour was not fixed to any one particular spot, but went about teaching over the whole country, we can easily understand that he should have thought fit at times to repeat the same parable, or the same prayer, first to one set of hearers, and then to another. St. Luke's account however is enough for us; and we need not look any further. One command from our Lord is as binding as ten thousand. In St. Luke we have the command in plain words: "When ye pray, say." And truly it would be well, if every command in the New Testa-

ment were kept as closely to the letter, as this of saying the Lord's Prayer. It is the first prayer a child learns, and except perhaps a collect or two, very often the only one. Many persons go through life without being able to repeat any prayer by themselves besides. It is a prayer too in constant use. I doubt not there are many amongst you, who say it regularly every night and morning. Now just think what that comes to even in a single twelvemonth. If you say the Lord's Prayer twice every day, you repeat it about seven hundred times in a year, without counting the many times you are called on to repeat it and to hear it in church on Sundays.

Why do I mention these things? why do I remind you of the seven hundred times a-year that you are in the habit of repeating the Lord's Prayer? In order to make you feel the importance of thoroughly understanding it. It may be excusable in very little children to repeat the mere words, provided they do so with a proper sense of fear and love, such as you may easily teach them to cherish for their heavenly Father, by telling them that he sits like a king above the glorious sun, and yet is good enough to send his angels down to watch over little children. And I would have you all tell them this. I would have you talk to your children from the very first about God, and talk of him in such a way as may lead them to fear and to love him. Make them understand, that, when they kneel down to say their prayers, they are going to speak to God Almighty, and to ask him to do all manner of good to you, their parents, to their brothers and sisters, and to themselves. If you do make them feel and understand this, if you teach them to lift up their little hands and hearts together, God will be pleased with their innocent prayer, and will not require from them thoughts and understanding above their years. But though this simple service is doubtless acceptable to him,

when it comes from young children, because it is the best they can offer, yet all who can must offer more. Those who are old enough to pray with the understanding, are bound to pray with the understanding. We must not always be children in addressing God, and go on year after year repeating words without meaning. We must learn to see and feel the sense of our prayers, and to weigh the words well before we utter them, that we may know what we are asking God to give us. This, you may be sure, was our Lord's purpose in teaching us his prayer. The words have no charm in them: they have no power of themselves to draw down blessings from above, or to please the God of wisdom and truth. On the contrary we shall rather provoke God, by using them carelessly and unthinkingly. You know, I do not say this to dissuade you from praying. Perhaps there is no duty which I have recommended to you oftener. It is your duty to pray. It is your privilege as Christians to speak to the King of heaven. It was for fear you should be at a loss for words to do so, or should not know how to pray, or what to pray for, that our Lord taught you all this in his prayer; which is so short, that the busiest may use it, so plain that the most unlearned may understand it, yet so full of meaning, that the wisest with all their thoughts, will never be tired of it, or have done with it. Be duly grateful then to Christ, your Master, for having given you such a prayer. Use it constantly: but use it like men who are fulfilling a reasonable service: use it like Christians, who know that they must worship God in truth, and must pray to him both with the spirit and with the understanding.

For the sake of helping you in doing so, better perhaps than you have hitherto been wont, I shall endeavour in this and some following sermons to shew you as much as I can of the meaning of this excellent prayer. The Lord's

Prayer, as it stands in St. Luke, may be divided into three parts. First there is a short address, or invocation, in which we declare to whom we are speaking: "Our Father, which art in heaven." Next come petitions for the glorifying of God's holy name, for the increase of his kingdom, and the establishment of his authority over the hearts and wills of men. These are followed by petitions for the relief of our own necessities, and the supply of our wants, both in body and soul. In St. Matthew's report of it, the whole is wound up with a humble acknowledgment that we are God's subjects, that he alone is able to help us, and that every good gift cometh from him. Such in a few words is the outline of the Lord's Prayer; and such are the parts it consists of. For the present we will confine ourselves to the first.

That first part I have called the address, or the invocation, because in it we invoke or call upon God by name, and tell him, as it were, that we are going to speak to him, and beg him to listen to what we are about to say. Now what is the name, which we are here taught to use in telling our wants to God? I would have you mark this well. In the Old Testament, you know, God is spoken of under divers names, as God Almighty, the Lord, the Lord God, the Lord of Hosts, the Lord Jehovah, the God of Abraham, the Holy One of Israel. These are the titles most commonly given to God in the Old Testament. They are names that speak of him as he is in himself, glorious and infinite in holiness and in power. But turn to the Lord's Prayer, and see what God is called in it. Is it by any of these names of greatness and might, which I have just recounted to you? No: they are too awful: they might frighten us away from his mercy-seat. Therefore God, who waits to be gracious, and desires to draw us to him, has taught us by his dear Son to call him by a name of love,

a name expressing his love and his care for us. We are permitted to address him as our Father.

This name, by which we are commanded to call upon God, is one of the most remarkable things in the whole prayer. There are the seeds of it indeed in the Old Testament, just as there are seeds of the other truths of the Gospel. For instance, we read in the last chapter of the 1st Book of Chronicles, that David, when he blessed the Lord in the joy of his heart at the sight of the rich offerings brought for the building of the temple, said, "Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our Father, for ever and ever!" So in two or three passages of the prophets the Jews are described as claiming God's protection on the ground of his being their Father. Yet even in these passages, in which God bears that name, it is rather as the father of the Jewish people. To fix upon that tender name, to choose it out from all God's other greater titles, and to appoint it as the special name by which Almighty God is to be addressed by all his sinful creatures, whenever they pray to him,—this was Christ's doing: this privilege we owe to him.

To us indeed, who have been accustomed to it from infancy, it may seem almost a matter of course to call God Father. But to do it, and that too with a certainty that he approves of it, is so far from being a matter of course, that, if God had not expressly authorized and commanded us, we should never have dared address him by that name: we should have felt it too great a presumption to claim relation with the Lord of the universe. For just consider: what should we think of a worm, if it could speak, calling God its Father? Should not we think it a piece of mad presumption? Yet in one sense he is as much the worm's father, as he is ours: for he made the worm, as well as man. Now the same sort of feeling, which would lead us to charge the worm with presumption for calling God its Father, would, I

think, have withheld us from calling him our Father, if we had not been authorized and commanded to do so. No such commandment, so far as appears from the Bible, was ever given to the children of Israel; at least never with sufficient distinction to be acted on. In the song of Moses indeed (Deut. xxxii. 6), the question is asked: "Is not the Lord thy Father that hath bought thee?" But this again is said with reference to the whole Jewish people, and to God's especial protection of them. In fact God was the King of Israel; but he never proclaimed himself the Father of each individual Israelite. That better and more loving name was kept for us, who are specially made his children by adoption. It was an additional privilege purchased for us by the merits of the blood of Christ. Would you know the value of that privilege? Hear what St. Paul says of it. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage" (the Jewish spirit) "again to fear: but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. And if we are the children of God, then are we heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." (Rom. viii. 15-17.) And again (Gal. iv. 6): "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son: and, if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Thus you see, St. Paul speaks of the privilege of calling God Father, as a new thing, recently granted to the sons of man, on their receiving the spirit of adoption, and being made the sons of God. You see too with what great things this new privilege is said to be connected; provided always that, in calling God Father, we do so from our hearts: for vain words and empty lip-service are the known objects of God's displeasure. If however we can call God our Father in the sincerity of our hearts, St. Paul teaches us to look upon this as a sign that God has taken us into favour, and considers us as his

children, and has appointed us an inheritance among Christ's brethren.

But without dwelling further on this highest view of the matter, any one may see what a step Christ gave us toward heaven, by commanding us to address our Maker, not as our God and King, but as our Father. Any one may see and feel what a pledge the name contains that God will listen to our prayers. Nothing is commoner than for a child, when it has been ill-used, to say, "I will run and tell father." Take a lesson, my friends, from your children; and in all your sorrows, in all your troubles, in all your wants, in all your temptations, in all your repentance, run for help to your Father, who is your God.

That you may do so the more readily, remember where that Father dwells. It is a Father which is in heaven, that you are to pray to. Therefore he must be most gracious; or he would never have allowed you to call him by such a name. He must be most powerful: for he is high above all things. He must be most wise; for he made the world. He is everlasting, and will endure without a change, when the heavens and the earth have passed away. Having then a Father, who is so powerful and so wise, and who is also unchangeable and everlasting, what an anchor of hope must this thought be to us! His wisdom assures us, that he will find a way so as to arrange the affairs of this world, that all our trials shall work together for our good, if we will only trust in him and love him. His power assures us, that, whatever he pleases to do for us he can do: if he is for us, no enemy can overcome us: if he defends us, no evil can harm us: if he has prepared an inheritance for us, nothing but our own fault can hinder our attaining to it. For still more to secure the promise of this inheritance, he is also everlasting and unchangeable. What he has purposed once, he will purpose to all eternity; and all that he has

promised to his faithful children, he will be careful as well as able to perform. He may indeed make them wait for it, till he has tried their faith and patience by the delay. But the word of the Lord standeth fast for ever; and all who have the patience to wait their Father's good time, shall in the end see his promises fulfilled.

Such are some of the comfortable thoughts most likely to spring up in the mind of every one who feels that he has a heavenly Father to call upon and trust in for help. But every privilege has its corresponding .duty. Every gift is a talent and a trust, for which we are to make God a return. Let us consider therefore, what duties the privilege, which Christ has bought for us, of calling God our Father, brings with it.

The first and chief duty is the behaving to him as children should behave to their father. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord," said our Saviour during his stay on earth, "and do not the things which I say?" (Luke vi. 46.) Why call ye me your heavenly Father, will God say to us from heaven, and feel not toward me as sons ought to feel? It is true, God is the Father of all, evil as well as good. But a father may have disobedient, rebellious children: and all who disobey and rebel against God,—nay, all who forget and neglect him,—God will be no Father to them. He will disown them: they will find that they have forfeited their inheritance: they will be banished from his presence: they will never taste the joys which he has prepared for his dutiful children. Therefore, I repeat it, we must feel toward God as children, we must behave to him as children, that we may not lose the blessing and the inheritance which Christ has purchased for us at so great a price. If we were forbidden any of us henceforth to pray to God as our Father again, should not we grieve at the loss, and feel that we had been deprived of a great privilege? Yet all who do not

pray to God at all, and all who pray to him without thinking, and all who lead such lives that their prayers are little better than a mockery,—all these do in fact deprive themselves of the right and happiness of calling God their Father. If we are aware how great a privilege it is, let us prove our sense of it by using it diligently. You need not be afraid of using it too often. Pray as often as ever you will, you cannot weary God with your petitions. To the prayer of the dutiful and godly heart his ears are always open.

But as the permission to call God our Father should make us love him, and encourage us to pray to him, so the knowledge that our Father is in heaven, and can do whatsoever he pleases, should fill us with faith and a courageous trust in him. Moreover it should raise our thoughts to heaven, and lead us to think of it, and to love it as our home. For what is home to a child, but where its father lives? If our Father then be dwelling in heaven, heaven must be our home. True, it is a home we have never yet seen. For we are like a king's children put out to nurse, and sent to school, at a distance from the palace, to be brought up hardily, and disciplined by divers kinds of trials, until we have learnt steadiness and self-knowledge enough to be admitted into our Father's glorious mansions. But, though we have never seen heaven, yet we know enough of it from Scripture to enable us to think of it, till our hearts kindle at the thought into an active desire of going thither. We know quite enough of it to teach us what we must do in order that we may be fitted for becoming dwellers there. We are told that it is the abode of happiness, the abode of love, the abode of peace, the abode of holiness: we know that no unclean thing can enter there, that no sinner can gain admission, that no soul spotted with that hideous leprosy will be allowed to carry its loathsomeness into the presence of God. Above all we know that heaven is our

home, the place we ought to be journeying to, the city of our destination, where our happiness is to consist in seeing our Father, and gazing on him till we become like him.

Here then is abundance of materials, out of which to regulate our lives, and to dress our thoughts for prayer. For such as heaven is, such should we be at all times, but more especially at the times when we are praying to our Father which is in heaven. The more spiritual, the more peaceful, the humbler our frame of mind, the fitter will it be for speaking to the Lord of the Universe, the Father of Spirits, the Prince of Peace. On the other hand, to address so mighty and holy a Being with hearts full of earth and the things of earth,—to speak as if we considered heaven our home, when we are laying up our treasure on earth,—to profess that we are only journeying through this life to another, and yet neither make provision nor wish for that other enduring life, and to spend our time as if this world were our all,—what is this but a mockery of our Father which is in heaven? and what effect can such a way of praying and of living have, except to draw down condemnation on our heads?

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you the great mercy and loving-kindness of the God of heaven, in humbling himself to behold the things that are done in the earth, and in allowing such creatures as we are to address him by the dear and honoured name of Father. I have shewn you that this is a christian privilege. I have shewn you the value you ought to set on it, and the use you ought to make of it. Lastly, I have spoken to you of the feelings with which it becomes us, outcasts from Paradise, to lift up our hearts to our God and Father, during our banishment and schooling here below. But there is still one little word in the beginning of the Lord's Prayer, which as yet I have made no remark on. That word is *our*. We are commanded to say,

our Father, and not *my* Father, to teach us not to pray for ourselves alone, but for the whole family of God and Christ on earth. When we say, Our Father, we ought to bear in mind that God has other children beside us, children who have equal claims on his mercy and love, children whom he loves as well as us, and that, if they are more pious and more obedient, he loves them better. We should remember too that, if we are all the sons of one common Father, we must all be brothers and sisters. Here is a fruitful subject for self-examination. Do we love as brothers? Do we live together as brothers ought to live, in peace and concord? Do we help each other to the utmost of our power? Do we rejoice in our brothers' prosperity, though the like may not befall ourselves? Do we feel that concern for their welfare, not in body only but in soul, which ought to live in the hearts of all such as declare themselves before God to be members of one great family, by praying not for ourselves alone, but in the same breath for our brethren also? This is the way in which the words of Scripture may be spiritualized and turned to profit,—namely, by pondering their meaning. The more we look, the more we shall find. Every step we take in the word of God brings out fresh and fresh truths to us, and reveals some new, unthought-of lesson of wisdom and holiness. By this one little word, *our*, we are reminded that the bond of brotherhood which links us together as children of the same Father ought at all times to be so present to us, that we are to mention it even in our prayers. We are not even to speak to God, except as members of a great family: we are not even to pray for general and common blessings to ourselves, without asking God to grant the same blessings to our neighbours also.

Such, my brethren, are the thoughts which the opening of the Lord's Prayer is fitted to awaken in the true Christian. Such are the feelings with which we are to come to God, when

we pray to him. We are to come to him humbly and gratefully for his merciful grace in admitting us so lovingly into his mighty presence. We are to come to him in faith and trust; for he is faithful, and will perform. We are to come to him with hearts full of love toward our neighbours: for he is their Father as well as ours: and no good father will listen to a son, who does not wish well to his brothers, and think well of them, and speak well of them, and do all the good he can to them. In a word, the address at the head of the Lord's Prayer is an exhortation to us to fulfil both the two great commandments. "I am your Father," saith God: "therefore love me. Your neighbours are my children: therefore love your brethren."

XXXIV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: SECOND PART.

GOD'S NAME: JUSTICE AND MERCY.

LUKE xi. 2.

Hallowed be thy name.

HAVING set before you the thoughts and feelings which our Saviour seems to have purposed to excite and call up in our souls, when he taught us to begin our prayer with saying, "Our Father, which art in heaven," I shall now go on to explain the second part of the Lord's Prayer, in which we tell our heavenly Father what are the first and dearest wishes of our hearts. That second part is made up of three petitions; petitions for what? for our own welfare? for our own health or wealth? for our own greatness? for our own honour? for the forgiveness of our own sins? for any one of the countless things that men's hearts are usually set on? Nothing of the sort. The petitions which Jesus has taught us to offer up in the second part of his Prayer, are not for our own honour, but for God's; that his name may be hallowed and glorified,—that his kingdom may be spread over the earth,—that his will may rule over the hearts and affections of all mankind. The prayer does not say, Grant, O Father, that our names may be held in honour;—but, "Hallowed be thy name!" It does not say, May riches, and power, and health, and every other

good thing come to us; but, "Thy kingdom come!" Nor does it teach us to pray that our own wills may be granted to us; but, "Thy will be done!"

Now is not this a marvellous thing, brethren? that, when we are praying,—that is, when we are speaking to God about all our chiefest wants, about everything that we have most at heart,—we are to pray for God's glory, and God's kingdom, and the doing of God's will, before we presume to ask anything for ourselves. Hence we may learn how entirely it is our duty on all and every occasion to give God, and the things of God, the first place in our hearts. For out of the abundance of the heart, you know, the mouth speaketh. Accordingly the same Lord, who here commands us, when we pray, to pray in the first instance for such things as pertain to the glory of God, before we say a word about our own private needs, has taught us in another place that the first thing we are to seek for is the kingdom of God and his righteousness, promising us that, if we do so, all such things as are necessary for our bodily life shall be added to us. My brethren, do you hear this gracious promise?—it is our Lord Jesus Christ who makes it,—that, if we will behave ourselves to God like dutiful sons, if we will prefer his honour to our own honour, his will to our own will, he on his part will behave to us like a bountiful and loving Father, and will give us the things we have need of in such measure as he shall think best for us. Let not this rich promise be thrown away upon us. Let us take hold of it, and obtain a share in it. Let us seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness above and before all things. Let us make these our first and chiefest objects, not in word only, but in deed. Then may we proceed with all humility to offer up petitions for ourselves, and pray God of his mercy to give us all things needful both for our souls and our bodies.

Do not say, brethren, that this is a hard lesson. For are you not God's children? Do you not call God your Father? Believe that he is so; and all the rest will be easy to you. Is not a good son anxious for his father's interests? Is not a good son jealous for his father's credit? Is not a good son pained, if his father's property is injured? Is not a good son moved to anger, if he hears his father ill spoken of? Only bear steadily in mind that you are the adopted sons of God; and after a time you will find little or no difficulty in entering into the spirit of the Lord's Prayer. You will soon grow to think it quite natural to pray for your Father's honour, for your Father's kingdom, and for the ready performance of your Father's will, before you give a thought to your own wants, or frame a petition for yourselves.

Of the three petitions which our Lord commands us to offer up for our Father's glory, the first is that his name may be hallowed, or, in other words, may be made and kept holy. Now what is meant here by God's name? God's name, in the language of Scripture, is all that we know about him, all that he has been pleased to tell us and declare to us about himself. For thus we read in the Book of Exodus (xxxiv. 6), that "the Lord descended in the cloud on Mount Sinai, and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." Such is God's name, that is, his nature and character, so far as he has been pleased to make it known to us: and it is for the hallowing of his name, or nature, or character, that Jesus teaches us to pray.

Not that God's name can be more truly holy in itself at

one time than at another. The name of the Holy One of Israel is always equally holy in itself; just as the sun in itself is always equally hot and glorious. To us, however, the sun is sometimes hotter and sometimes colder, sometimes brighter, and sometimes less bright: sometimes too we lose sight of it altogether, and are left in night and darkness. So it is with God's name. Though in itself it is always holy, all-holy, yet by us sinners it is more reverenced and more hallowed at one time than at another. There is a summer of the soul, when we bask in the sunshine of God's countenance; and there is also a winter of the soul, when our souls are cold and wither for the want of his cheering, enlivening presence. There is a night too of the soul, when we lose all sense and feeling of his holiness, and are as it were left in the darkness of sin. Therefore, in praying that God's name may be hallowed, we pray that there may be no more spiritual winter, no more spiritual darkness, but that the souls of all men may at all times feel the same bright and gladdening sense of God's true nature and character: we pray that all men may at all times think of God truly as he is.

Now there is much need, believe me, of praying for this. There is much need of praying that we may all of us always cherish true and holy and reverent thoughts about God. For very few persons, I fear, are in the habit of thinking of God truly as he is. Very few persons are in the habit of thinking of God exactly as he has revealed himself to us in the Bible. Many go so far wrong, that, when they are tempted to do evil, they will even say in their hearts, "Tush! God does not care for this or that. He will not be so severe as to punish or mark such things as sabbath-breaking, or getting drunk now and then. Surely he will overlook them: surely he must forgive them." Now they who speak or think in this manner, are so far from hallowing or honouring God's name, that in fact they do him the greatest dis-

honour. They lower his holiness, and bring it down from the height and purity of heaven to the low, crooked, corrupt standard of erring and sinful man. If God were such a God as these wicked men fancy, he would no longer be God. He would want all that hatred of wickedness, and all that perfect justice, which now shine forth in him so brightly; and he would have the easiness, the carelessness, the good-nature, as we choose to call it, but, more correctly speaking, the weakness of a man. One may easily see what an insult it is to God, to think of him in this low degrading manner. Accordingly in the 50th Psalm this is the last complaint brought forward by God against the wicked, that they thought him such a one as themselves. "These things hast thou done," he there says to the wicked man, after numbering up his sins, "these things hast thou done, and I held my tongue;—I did not straightway shew forth my wrath, and send out my vengeance to consume thee;—and thou thoughtest wickedly that I am even such a one as thyself,—unmindful of my word, and heedless of what goes on in the world.—But I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things that thou hast done.—I will prove to thee that I have not forgotten thy sins, but will set them before thee in all their hatefulness; and not one of the number shall be left out.—O consider this, ye that forget God, ye that either banish him altogether from your thoughts, or dishonour him by robbing him of his justice and holiness, consider this, bethink yourselves of my name, bethink yourselves that I will by no means clear the guilty—lest I pluck you away—in the very midst of your sins,—and there be none to deliver you." Such is the meaning of God's language to those wicked persons who would make him out to be like themselves, careless and regardless about good and evil. Would, my brethren, that I could make you see this in its true light! Would that I could make you all understand and feel, that

there are no sins, no wilful sin, no sin repeated and persevered in, which can be little before God! There is nothing too little for God to see, nothing so trifling that God should overlook it. His eye is over all his works. Look at the smallest leaf, at the tiniest flower, at the pettiest insect. Does God even overlook them? On the contrary, their colours are often as bright, and all their parts are as delicate, as finely formed and nicely put together, as if God had employed all his care and wisdom and power in making them. The very hairs of our heads, we know, God does not overlook: even them, we know, he has numbered. My brethren, if God numbers the hairs of our heads, be ye sure that he also numbers the sins of our souls. Not one of them will be forgotten. Nor deceive yourselves with the thought that small sins cannot be dangerous even though God does take note of them. How is it with poisons? Does it take a great quantity to kill a man? A few grains or drops of the deadlier poisons, a cupful of the least dangerous, is enough to lay us in the grave. And so it is with sin. Some sins may be deadlier and still more hopeless than others; but any one sin persisted in and unrepented of is enough to kill the soul.

On the other hand, as the hardened sinner dishonours God's name, by robbing him of his justice and hatred against sin, so does the despairing sinner dishonour God in another way, by forgetting his mercy and loving-kindness. For if it be part of God's name, that he "will by no means clear the guilty," it is equally a part of his name,—yes, and a dearer part, a part which he values more highly, a part which he declares to us more frequently,—that he "is merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin;"—on the repentance—for so the Gospel adds,—on the repentance and amendment of the sinner. If

any one then paints God to himself as harsh and cruel and unforgiving,—if any one is afraid of coming to God through Christ in full faith and humble trust of being received into favour,—such a man dishonours God's name of mercy, just as the bold and hardened sinner dishonours God's name of justice. Both Justice and Mercy are part of God's name: they both belong to him, and are both inseparable from him. They are, as it were, his right and left hands; Justice being the left hand, wherewith he strikes the impenitent down to hell,—Mercy the right hand, wherewith he seals the pardon of every humble and contrite soul, and takes it, and lifts it up to heaven.

Therefore, when we pray that God's name may be hallowed among the sons of men, we pray, in other words, that they may have such a true and lively sense both of his justice and of his mercy, as may lead them at once to fear and to love him. We pray too that the fear and the love of God may be ever present to men's minds, so as to frighten them from sin, and win them over to God and goodness. For this is the right use to make of the great things which the Bible tells us of God's mercy and longsuffering, and of his anxiety to save sinners. These things should not encourage us to go on sinning, but rather should melt us with shame for our past offences, and make us deem it ungenerous and base to take advantage of God's goodness, and persist in disobeying and grieving so loving and merciful a Father. This, I say, is the right use to make of our knowledge that God's name is Mercy: and he who turns his knowledge to this account,—he who is melted and won over by God's inestimable goodness in sending his Son Jesus Christ to bring us back to him, that he would not offend him for a thousand worlds,—that man may be said to truly hallow God's name, whether he is uttering it with his lips or no. He has a right sense of God's true nature, and, to

speak with St. Peter, has sanctified the Lord God in his heart.

But since we are made up of soul and body, not only does it behove us to sanctify and hallow our Father and Saviour in our hearts and souls; we must also hallow him with our bodies, and with outward actions, by paying him that tribute of reverence on all occasions, which is due from a creature to its great Maker, from a son to a royal Father, from a pardoned sinner to a forgiving God. Here we may take a lesson from the account in St. Luke of the woman who was a sinner. She was not content with feeling love and reverence for Jesus Christ in her heart; she shewed and proved her love, by standing at his feet behind him, weeping, and kissing his feet, and washing them with her tears, and wiping them with her long hair, and anointing them with precious ointment. She did all this, because she had been forgiven much. And have not we too been forgiven much? Let us then in like manner shew our reverence to God, by paying him every outward service with our bodies: for they too, as well as our souls, are his.

For instance, let us hallow him with our tongues and voices, by telling forth all his praise, especially by joining in the public service of the Church, in repeating and singing the Psalms, and uttering the responses aloud. Let us hallow him with our bodies, by kneeling when we pray, or at least, if we cannot kneel, by standing, instead of sitting or lolling irreverently, as too many are apt to do while the prayers are offered up by the minister. Let us hallow him in all our conversation, by carefully refraining from all bad words, from all sinful and impure and unholy talk, and from everything which borders on cursing and swearing,—that boldest, that most unhallowed, that most foolish of sins.

Lastly, let us hallow God's name by reverencing every thing belonging to him, his word, his day, his sacraments,

his ministers, his people. "If a man hate his brother," says St. John, "how can he love God?" So, if a man despise and mock at a Christian, how can he be said to hallow Christ? "Love me," says God, "and love my people; reverence me, and reverence my people." Yet how many men are there who would be surprised and greatly offended if they were told that they do not hallow God, and who nevertheless are in the habit of jeering and sneering at all such persons as shew what they deem an over-scrupulous anxiety to hallow God's name in everything they say and do! Many are they who will speak scornfully of such persons, especially if they happen to make a slip. How unreasonable is this, as well as unchristian! No one, so long as he continues here on earth, can become perfect in all the graces of the christian life. The hill of godliness is steep and slippery; and hardly any foot is so steady, that it will not falter and give way now and then, especially in the lower part of the ascent. If two brothers were travelling together, a long and toilsome journey, to their father's home, and one of them were to stumble or fall by the way, would it be brotherly in the other to laugh at him, to spit upon him, to cry shame upon him, and thus to dishearten him for the rest of the road? Would their father look with favour on a brother who had behaved in such a manner? Would it not be the part of a brother to help up him who had fallen, to cheer him, and to give him an arm to lean on until he had recovered his strength? So do ye, when any brother offends. Comfort him; help him out of his strait; pray to God to help him, and to blot out his sin, so that his name may again be hallowed in the life of his faithful servant.

Such, my brethren, is the meaning of this great petition, when taken in its full extent and import. We pray, that an abundant crop of holiness may spring up in every quarter of the earth. But while we pray this for others, surely we

ought also to pray that it should spring and grow up and ripen and bear fruit in our own bosoms. Sanctify the Lord God therefore in your hearts; sanctify him in your lives; remembering that it must be a mere mockery, every time you say the Lord's Prayer, to beg God to make you holy, if you are dishallowing and dishonouring him all the while by continuing wilfully in sin.

XXXV.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: THIRD PART.
GOD'S THREEFOLD KINGDOM.

LUKE xi. 2.

Thy kingdom come.

AFTER the petition that God's name may be hallowed, we are taught to pray for the coming of his kingdom. Now what is this kingdom, the coming of which our Lord thus commands us to ask and wish for? The kingdom of God, so far as we have any concern with it in this prayer,—so far as it is still to come, and therefore must be something different from that rule and dominion which he is always exercising over every part of his creation,—the kingdom of God, for the coming of which we are to pray, is a threefold kingdom. There is his kingdom and authority over the souls of all true believers; which we will call his spiritual kingdom. There is his kingdom upon earth, or his Church; which we will call his visible kingdom; because it is visible to all men, and all may see it. Lastly, there is his heavenly kingdom, which is to come after the resurrection, and to last for ever. Now with each of these three kingdoms we have all a great deal to do.

We have to do with Christ's spiritual kingdom: because, if he does not first reign in us, he will never reign over us,

at least with our own consent. If he does not begin with ruling our hearts, he will never rule our actions, except it be by putting a bit in our mouths, and forcing us to go this way or that, and to do his purpose against our wills. Now, concerning this kingdom of God in the soul of man, which I have called his spiritual kingdom, there is a very remarkable text in the 17th chapter of St. Luke; where our Lord, on being asked by some of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God would come, said to them, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." As though he had said to them, "You are merely wasting your time in looking about for the kingdom of God, as if it was to be some great and wonderful sight, which you were to see with the eyes of the body. Look within: look whether God is reigning there: look whether he is the master and owner of your hearts. If he is, then you may rest satisfied: for then his kingdom is within you." This kingdom of God, which is, or ought to be, founded and established in the heart of every one of us, is what I mean, when I speak of his spiritual kingdom; and surely we have all to do with that.

But we have also to do with God's visible kingdom, that is to say, with the Church of Christ. Of this blessed institution it would require the tongue of a prophet or an apostle to speak worthily. It is the best and most glorious thing on earth. Our Lord, as St. Paul tells us, purchased it with his own blood: he hallowed it with his Spirit: he taught it by his apostles: ever since his death he has continued to watch over it, and to keep it from the powers of darkness, down to the present day: and he still enlightens and guides it by his word and by his ministers, and enriches it with his sacraments and with his grace. Such is God's visible kingdom, which our Lord left behind him to serve him, and to bear

witness of him upon earth. This is the city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid. It is the city of Zion, a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth, in whose courts God is known for a sure refuge. But, if this be God's visible kingdom, who are the people of it? We are. We, and every other person who has entered into a covenant with God and Christ by baptism, who acknowledges the truth of his holy word, and professes to receive Christ as his Lord and Saviour,—we are all the people of that sacred kingdom. Therefore our dissenting brethren belong to it as well as we. They, like ourselves, are baptized into the faith of Jesus: they, like ourselves, profess to take the Bible for their guide: they, like ourselves, own Jesus for their Lord and Saviour. Therefore it would be unjust and uncharitable to deny that they are God's people as well as we. Whether they act like his people, in separating from their brethren on such small grounds as most of them bring against us, is another question, which I will not speak of now. Suffice it, that whatever the more violent of them may say against us, we return not railing for railing. Though they have gone away from us, and left us, and so made a division in the land, let us still acknowledge them to be our brethren, and gladly allow them to be a part of God's people. Such is God's visible kingdom. We of the Church of England form one portion of it; the Dissenters form another portion of it; the Roman Catholics form a third, though a very corrupt portion. In a word, wherever Christ is worshipped, wherever his sacraments are administered, wherever salvation is preached through faith in him, there is a branch of the Church of Christ, there is a portion of God's visible kingdom, which, as David sings in the 48th Psalm, is appointed to be the joy of the whole earth.

Moreover, we have also to do with God's heavenly kingdom, that kingdom which is promised to Christ's faithful

people, that kingdom where God Almighty, after executing judgment on the wicked, and rooting out all the workers of iniquity, and destroying sin and death, will reign for ever over his obedient children in a new world of righteousness and glory.

Such is God's threefold or triple kingdom: and it is for the coming of this threefold kingdom that we are taught to pray, by saying, Thy kingdom come. Let us keep this well in mind: when we are uttering these words in our daily prayers let us recollect their meaning, and remember what we are asking for. Let us recollect that we are asking God to fix his spiritual kingdom in our hearts. This is a great petition, and well worth pondering. Let us further recollect that we are asking him to increase and enlarge and strengthen his visible kingdom. Here is another great petition. Lastly, let us recollect that we are expressing a wish for the coming of his heavenly kingdom, where no evil of any kind will be allowed to set foot, and where only holiness will enter. Here is another wonderful petition, and perhaps the most worth pondering of all.

In the first place, when you say, Thy kingdom come, you are asking your heavenly Father to fix his spiritual kingdom in your hearts. This, I said, is a great petition, and well worth pondering. For just consider what it comes to, if you take it in its full meaning. It amounts to beseeching your heavenly Father to come to you and reign in your souls. Now do you really wish this? If not, why do you ask for it? But if you do wish for it as every true Christian should, remember it is not a small thing you are asking. It is not a small thing to invite the King of kings to come in all his robes of holiness and righteousness, to fix his throne within you. What preparation have you made to receive so great a visitor? Have you done the little you can do, by sweeping and garnishing the chambers of your hearts, and

trying to cleanse them from everything which you know would be offensive in his sight? You would not ask the king of England to a dirty house: nor should you ask God to a sinful heart, unless it be that he may purify it for himself by the cleansing of the Holy Spirit. If indeed you are conscious how little you can do for yourself, after trying your very best,—if by sad experience you have been taught your own weakness, and cry to God from the bottom of a throbbing heart, Lord, I am unclean, cleanse thou my uncleanness,—your God and Father will not disdain your prayers. But meantime you must do your very best. You must at least cleanse the outside of the platter; for that is in your power. You must break off every evil practice, give up every sinful indulgence, and strive,—it is our Saviour's own word,—you must strive to do your duty to the utmost of your present powers and knowledge. This is the way to have your prayer for God's spiritual presence in your heart and soul answered: for so it is written: "He that keepeth my commandments, he loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father: and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." As though our Saviour had said, "If a man will really do his best,—not that sleepy doing one's best, which people talk about, and which in fact is doing nothing,—but if a man will do his best in good earnest to obey God, and strive, as people strive when their life is at stake, and their hearts are in their work,—then (says Christ, concerning that man) I will accept his earnest endeavours as a proof of love, and I will come to him, and will manifest myself to him. I will make him understand the beauty and the excellency of the perfect law of God. I will enable him to see and feel my goodness in dying to save him. I will open the eyes of his mind to perceive and comprehend that wonderful scheme of redemption, by which God's mercy has free room given to

it, without the slightest infringement of his holiness. I will show him all these truths, and bring them home to him." And now mark what follows. "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come to him, and make our abode with him." The shewing forth of Christ's goodness is here supposed to produce its due effect on the man who is truly desirous of obeying God. It kindles love in him. He begins to love Christ. As a natural consequence of that love, he begins to keep Christ's words, both by striving to obey them, by endeavouring to do whatever Christ has commanded him to do,—and also by studying them, and poring over them, and trying to dive deeper and deeper into their meaning, that he may fish up the goodly pearls which lie at the bottom of all our Lord's sayings. Thus the man advances from obeying God's law to loving Christ, and from loving Christ to delighting in his Gospel, until at last he becomes godly; and so God loves him, and comes to him, and makes his abode with him.

This, my brethren, is the only way in which your prayer to your heavenly Father to come and establish his spiritual kingdom within you can be fulfilled. You must begin with obedience, and persevere in it until Christ shall be pleased to manifest himself to you. Thence will spring love, and an anxious desire to please him; which will carry you on in time to godliness. It is scarcely necessary for me to warn you that no step can be taken in all this to any good purpose without the help of the Spirit, and that this help must be sought by constant and diligent prayer. It will be more to the purpose to remind you that, after the first step, after the first snapping of the chain of sinful habit, the whole of the work I have been describing is gradual. It comes not by observation. It is a growth: so that you must not look for violent or sudden changes in yourself. Only be

anxious to be always moving forward. Remember that the waters of the stream, however slowly they may at times appear to move, yet by never stopping on their journey are sure to reach the great sea. Let your progress toward godliness be like that of the gentle stream, which neither murmurs, nor chafes, nor dashes against its banks, but keeps ever flowing on and on, until it has fulfilled the task which God has set it, and loses its own littleness by mingling with the mighty waters.

But beside praying for the establishment of God's spiritual kingdom in our own hearts, we are also to pray for the increase and enlargement of his visible kingdom upon earth: I mean his Church. For, though that kingdom be already come in some degree, it has hitherto come in part only, and not wholly. Many nations are still without the Gospel. Many parts of every great nation are still without it. Even in our own land, who can doubt that there are thousands upon thousands, especially in large towns, who know next to nothing of God and Christ, thousands who never set foot in a place of worship, who never hear of God except in oaths, and never speak of him except to take his name in vain? Can the kingdom of God be said in any just sense to have come to such people as these? Therefore we have still great reason to pray that God's kingdom may be extended to the nations who are still beyond the pale of it, and also that it may be strengthened and acknowledged more and more in the countries where it is already established. But God works by human means and human hands. Therefore, in praying for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, we are in fact praying for God's blessing on the labours of all who are endeavouring to spread the Gospel among the heathens and Turks and Jews. So, in praying for the strengthening of Christ's kingdom, we pray to God to prosper all attempts which may be made in

this and other christian lands, by preaching and teaching, by building churches, by founding and supporting schools, by distributing the word of God and other pious books, to bring the ignorant and the wicked to a knowledge of their Lord and King. Now here again I ask you, do you really wish for this? Do you really wish to see the day come, when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the whole earth with the same depth and fullness as the waters cover the sea? so that, go where you will, you shall not find a spot where Christ's authority is not fully acknowledged. Do you indeed wish for this, as well as ask for it? If so, you will do something to hasten on that happy day, beside praying. *Thy kingdom come* is but three words. To say these three words night and morning is hardly enough for the least among you to give toward the bringing about of so blessed an object. You ought to give something more, and that for the best of reasons,—because you can. I would therefore advise every one of those among you who live by their own labour, if he really has the coming of God's visible kingdom at heart, to lay by something,—say a penny a month,—as an earnest offering to God, to shew your sincerity and earnestness in the good cause. This will make a shilling a year: and you may give it at the year's end to one among the many societies established in this land for pious purposes.

Let none say within himself, What good will a shilling do? If it could do no other good, it would shew your goodwill: it would shew your readiness to make a sacrifice for the sake of Christ's kingdom. For you who are poor can give nothing in alms, without feeling it. Those who are well off in the world, give out of their abundance. A few shillings more or less make little or no difference to them: they give, and never miss them. But with the poor it is not so. If a poor man lays by a shilling for godly

purposes, he must take it from himself. He must give up some little indulgence, he must stint himself in something or other, before he can afford himself the pleasure of giving alms. This is why every good man values the charitable offering of the poor so much: because theirs is real giving; and with such giving, when it springs from right motives, from thankfulness and love to God, and good-will to their fellow-men, the high and mighty God is well pleased. Even therefore if I thought that the shillings of the poor were likely to be of little use in furthering the increase of God's kingdom, I would still say, lay by your pennies, and give your shillings, for your own sakes, that you may enjoy the satisfaction of laying by, and the pleasure of giving, for such a purpose. But it is a great mistake to fancy that the alms of the poor cannot tell. Though they cannot give much, yet if they were all to give a little, their great numbers would more than make up for the smallness of their gifts. Assuredly there are at least a million of persons in England, who never give anything toward such purposes, and who might easily give a shilling apiece every year. Now a million shillings is fifty thousand pounds. What might not be done by such a sum, if it were employed in building churches, or schools, or in whatsoever manner, for the strengthening and enlarging of God's kingdom? A chapel that would hold many more people than this church, might be built for a thousand pounds: so that fifty well-sized chapels might be built every year out of these shillings of the poor: and thus in a few years there would not be a nook in all England in which God had not a house.

To shew what might be done by the poor in a good cause, let me tell you what is done daily in a bad cause. You know who are the drinkers of ardent spirits. It is not generally the rich, nor, in England, the country-poor. In

Scotland and Ireland indeed the case is different: there, alas! the curse of drinking spirits is to be seen in the country as well as the towns. But in England it is confined for the most part to the manufacturers and mechanics, and the rest of the poorer classes in the towns. Yet how much do you suppose is spent daily for ardent spirits on an average throughout these kingdoms? Fifty thousand pounds! fifty thousand pounds a-day for gin! Such is the power of small sums when laid out for evil purposes. So much more active and zealous in their generation are the children of this world than the children of light. It seems a very great thing to think it possible that the labouring poor should in the course of a year give to God a sum no greater than what the gin-drinkers give every day to their god. For the gin-drinker's god is his belly: and to that god, to a mad and devilish thirst for strong drink, he gives not his money merely, but often his clothes, his peace of mind, the decency of his children, the comforts of his home, and, it is far too probable, in most cases his immortal soul into the bargain. Such is the god of drink. Did Moloch, who delighted in human blood, require more horrible sacrifices? Whereas your gift, the gift I am advising you to make, if it were offered in a right spirit, in a humble love of God, and an earnest desire for the coming of his kingdom, would be attended with peace and joy; and he who approved of the widow's mite, would also look with favour on your monthly penny. This of course I say only to those among you who earn their own livelihood by their labour. From the old and infirm who live upon charity, I would not wish it. On the other hand, from those whom God has blessed with greater plenty, his mercies surely deserve that out of their abundance they should offer more. But whether you are richer, or whether you are poorer, I would press on you the duty of setting by some-

thing every year, specially for religious purposes, as a token of your thankfulness to your heavenly Father for his having brought you to a knowledge of his will, while so many others are in darkness and ignorance.

There is another method however, beside subscribing to religious purposes, by which every head of a family may bear part in establishing God's visible kingdom on earth: and that is by establishing it in his own family. If every family in the world were visibly christian, the world would be christian: and till every family in the world is visibly christian, the whole world cannot be christian, the kingdom of God cannot be fully come. In families, as well as in nations, should the worship of God be set up visibly. So well aware of this were the heathens, that, in addition to their national or country gods, they used also to have their household gods, to which they prayed in their own dwellings, and burnt incense on their own hearths. Shall the heathens give such heed to the duty of consecrating every family to some heavenly power? and shall we, who have been taught to know the true God, neglect to consecrate our families to him? Shall they pay more worship to their false gods, than we pay to the God of heaven? Set up the worship of God and Christ then visibly in your families. Let every house be a church: and let all who dwell in it be a congregation holy to the Lord. Remember, Christ's promise is, that, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, he will be amongst them. Let prayers be regularly offered up, at least once a day, in your assembled family; and wherever a reader can be found, let a few verses of the Gospel be read aloud, as part of the service. So will you show yourselves to be desirous of the coming of God's invisible kingdom: so will you visibly consecrate your families to Christ, and enthrone him in your dwellings as your king.

Moreover, as I said above, in praying that God's kingdom may come, we utter a wish for the coming of his heavenly kingdom: and this, I told you, is perhaps the most worth pondering of all the petitions I have been speaking of. For when God's heavenly kingdom comes, evil ends, sin is punished, and holiness alone survives. Everything but penitence and faith and love must be swept away and disappear, at that great and terrible coming of our Lord to judge the world. Now do we really wish for the coming of that great day? Should we be glad to know it was to come to-morrow? If an angel were to shew himself at this moment, and to bring a message from our Lord and Master, that to-night at twelve o'clock he will descend from heaven, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God, and that we are to be straightway caught up into the clouds, and to appear to-morrow before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of our past lives,—if such a message were to be brought to us at this moment, should we rejoice at it? Yet this, and nothing short of this, is the coming of God's heavenly kingdom. I fear, there are very very few men who can say from the bottom of their hearts, that for themselves, without thinking of their neighbours, they would be truly and heartily glad of this. I am sure, for one, I could not say it. I could not say that I desire without a moment's further preparation to be hurried before Christ's tribunal. My prayer would be the same as David's: O spare me a little! And your prayer, brethren, would doubtless be the same. And it would not be a formal, lifeless, dull, unmeaning prayer. You would begin to pray, on hearing such a message, as you never prayed before in your lives.

But if this be so, if the instant coming of Christ's heavenly kingdom would be so appalling to us, why are we taught to pray for it? We are taught so, to keep us mindful of it. We are taught so, as a warning of what must happen to us,

whether we pray for it or no. We are taught so, as a lesson to shew us what we ought to be, and what, as true Christians, we ought to wish for. For it is not the part of a true Christian to be fearful of his Saviour's coming. If we did not sinfully and shamefully come short of that high estate to which Christ purposed to raise his people, we should long for Christ's coming, instead of dreading it. What does St. John say at the end of the Revelation, when Jesus tells him that he will come quickly? Does he shrink from the thought? does he beg his Lord to delay his coming? On the contrary he says, "Amen! even so come, Lord Jesus!" that is, come as thou hast said: make no long tarrying: hasten to set thy servants free from the warfare which Satan is waging against them. Such is St. John's language: and what does St. Paul say? That to him "to die is gain:" that he has "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Phil. i. 21-23.) My brethren, if we had the spirit of St. John and St. Paul,—and I know no reason for our not having it, except that we pray less, and strive less against temptation, and have less faith, and less love—if we had the true christian spirit which burnt so brightly in those first Christians, we too should desire to depart and to be with Christ: we too should feel that to die is gain: we too should cry, as they did, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

XXXVI.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: FOURTH PART.

GOD'S WILL, NOT OURS.

LUKE xi. 2.

Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.

IN my last sermon I spoke to you about the nature of God's kingdom, for the coming of which our Lord teaches us to pray. I shewed you that it was a threefold kingdom. I explained to you that, when we say, Thy kingdom come, we pray first for God's spiritual kingdom, that it may be set up and established in our hearts: secondly, for his visible kingdom, or Church, that it may increase and spread until it fill the whole earth: and lastly, for his heavenly kingdom, that it may soon drive away and put an end to every kind of sin and sorrow, and leave nothing to be seen in the new heavens and the new earth, which God will then create, but a glorious God, filling all things with his presence, and ruling with a father's love over his dutiful and holy children. In a word, when we say, Thy kingdom come, we pray God to put forth his royal power, and to shew himself the sovereign of all the earth so plainly and openly, that we and all the other sons of men may, both outwardly with our eyes, and inwardly in our hearts, see and feel and own him to be our king.

But a king must have subjects. A king without subjects to obey him, a king without a people to love and follow him, would be a sorry sight. He would be merely the mockery of a king, and no more a real one, than a shadow is a living man. It is not enough therefore that we call God King, and Jesus Lord, unless we do the things which they command us. It is not enough for God's kingdom to come, in fact it cannot come properly and as it ought to come, it cannot come in all its fullness and excellence, unless God's will be also done. This however is so unpleasant to man, —this doing God's will is so hard and grating to flesh and blood, especially in the beginning of our course,—that perhaps there is no truth in the whole Gospel which we are readier and more anxious to forget, than this great one, that it is doing and not saying only, that God requires of us. The promises of the Gospel are great and glorious; and we are glad to lay claim to them. The forms of religion may seem a little tiresome to us: still we cannot feel comfortable if we keep away from them altogether; and so we bring ourselves not to neglect them. But the doing God's will as he would have us,—though this, you must be aware, is the pith and kernel of the whole matter,—the doing it wholly and thoroughly, at all times and in all places, the obeying God with that perfect obedience which he demands of us,—an obedience which extends to all our words and thoughts, as well as to all our outward actions,—an obedience which brings every power of our minds, and every feeling of our hearts, and every member of our bodies, under ready subjection to the will of God—this is the great difficulty which stops so many in their christian journey. It is like a great steep mountain which blocks up the road to heaven: and some of us waste our time in trying to find a path round it; and some of us fall asleep at the foot of it; and some of us in despair turn our backs on it, and set our faces toward the

way of sin and death: but few, very few, have the wisdom and the courage to say within ourselves, "The city of our God and King is at the top of that steep mountain: unless I climb the mountain, I can never get there: so the sooner I begin the better. True, the mountain does seem very steep now that I am looking up it from the bottom: but the ascent may not be so difficult as it appears: and at any rate, in the strength of my God and King, and through faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible assures me I can do all things. Therefore I will begin to climb at once." Few persons have wisdom and courage enough to make up their minds to follow the will of God in this plain straightforward manner. Most men want to avoid it if they can. Some would compound for their duty, by keeping God's law whenever they have a mind to it, or whenever they are not particularly tempted to the contrary; or perhaps they might consent to keep the greater part of it, provided they are allowed to indulge now and then in some little darling sin. But the trying to keep the whole of the perfect law of God, the endeavour to act up to all the heavenly precepts delivered in the Sermon on the Mount, this is so distasteful to flesh and blood, we have need to be continually reminded that God will not be satisfied with less. Therefore Christ has taken care to remind us of it, by making it a part of our daily prayers. He has commanded us, when we pray, to say, not only, Thy kingdom come, but also, Thy will be done.

This indeed is the petition with which we have the closest concern. It shews us what ought to be the great aim and end of our lives,—that we may be able to do the will of God. After praying to our Father that his name may be hallowed, and that his kingdom may come, we pray that his will may be done: for unless his will be done, his kingdom cannot come, his name cannot be hallowed. Or can a

father be said to be honoured by his children, while they are disobeying him? Can a king be said to reign over his subjects, while they are rebelling against him? Here I would have you mark our Lord's word. He does not bid us pray that God's laws may be obeyed, or that his commandments may be kept, but that his will may be done. Now why is this? Plainly, because the doing God's will embraces everything else. It includes all obedience and submission and patience and humility, the virtues most desirable in a Christian. Besides, by teaching us to pray that God's will may be done, or, in other words, by teaching us that we are to strive to make God's will our own, which of course is the thing meant, Jesus struck at the taproot of the evil in our fallen and corrupted nature. The great mischief of the fall of Adam was, that it burst the golden chain which bound man to God. Man broke loose from God, and made himself independent of him, and left the safe and the straight way of his commandments, to walk in the light of his own eyes, and after the devices of his own heart. In short, man at the fall set up his own will against God's; and so his will became corrupt and tainted, as everything must become when God's purifying Spirit leaves it. Man set up his own will. This is the great disease and the main evil of our nature. It comes to us from our parents: it shews itself soon after our birth: and the seeds of it continue to lurk, even in the best of men, as long as they remain in the body.

The disease, I say, shews itself soon after our birth. If you doubt this, look at infants. Mark how violent and fretful they become, even while they are still in arms, if you do the least thing to cross them. But perhaps you will say, "They are only babies, and don't know any better." Well! wait till they do know better: wait till they are five or six years old. Is the matter improved then? You know that,

generally speaking, it is not. You know that your complaint of your child at six years old is the same that it was at fifteen months: "The child will have its own way." You are quite right: the child will have its own way, unless you take great pains to teach it better. And when it grows up to be a boy, it will try to have its own way as a boy: and when it grows up to be a man, it will try to have its own way as a man. Nay, at threescore and ten, if God spares its life so long, unless its heart has been renewed beforehand, we should still have the very same story: we should still see the old man, with white hairs on his head, and a crutch in his hand, and one foot in the grave,—if we could read his heart, we should still see him making a point of having his own way.

Another proof of the same thing, were further proof needful, might be found in the common saying, "I will do it, because I choose it," not because I think it right, not because I shall do myself any good by it, but because I choose it: that is, because it is my will, and I have the power of doing it, and nobody shall hinder me. A more foolish answer than this, or a worse answer, or an answer more unworthy of a Christian, or even of a reasonable being, there cannot be. Yet I dare say most of you must have heard it. I have myself often heard it made by boys. And though men, when they are grown up, are mostly too much on their guard to avow so absurd a feeling, yet the same love of doing a thing merely because one chooses it, without any better reason, is far too common among men also: in truth, it lies at the bottom of half the foolish obstinacy in the world. But it is useless to argue the matter further. It is a question of mere fact; every one, without argument, may decide it for himself by looking into his own heart. Ask yourselves, Do not you like to have your own way, because it is your own way? and that too even when some

other way, which a neighbour points out to you, is clearly more for your good.

Now what is the cause of all this? What is the cause of this desire, which shews itself in us at all the different stages of life, from the earliest down to the latest? What is the origin of this distempered feeling, which stands us in stead of reason, and which will often lead a man to act against his plain interest? The cause is that unreasonable and corrupt self-will, which we have all inherited from Adam, which shews itself differently in different men, but which in some way or other is sure to shew itself in every one not thoroughly converted.

Having thus found out the cause of the disorder, we may more easily see how it is to be cured. We must get rid of that cause: we must root out that self-will, which is the source of the whole evil. We must take God's will for our rule and guide, and must endeavour by all the means in our power, by prayer, by meditation, by self-denial, to bring our own will first into complete obedience to God's, and then to make it one with God's. We must learn to look upon our wills as impious and rebellious, because they set themselves in opposition to God. We must learn to look upon them as mad, because they set themselves in opposition to reason. We must learn to look upon them as tyrants, because they govern us absolutely, without law, and against law. This mad, rebellious, impious tyranny of the will must not be allowed to trample on us any longer. It must be overthrown: which can only be done by setting up God's will in its place. Accordingly this is the very remedy which Jesus Christ has pointed out to us, by teaching us to pray to our heavenly Father that his will, and not ours, may be done. Remember then, when you are making this petition to God, you are in fact asking him to cure the great disorder of your nature, and to remedy the evil brought upon you by

Adam's fall. By that fall our wills were cut off from God's; and the evil and mischief can never be done away, until they are joined to God's will again.

I said a while ago that the doing God's will includes obedience, and submission, and patience, and several other christian graces. At first perhaps, when we say, Thy will be done, we think only of that portion of God's will which is to be done by us, such as keeping his commandments, and doing our duty toward him, and toward our neighbour. But there is another portion of God's will, which must also be taken into account. I mean that portion of it which is done toward us, and which exercises our patience and our faith, as that portion of it which is to be done by us, exercises our obedience and activity. Most of us are ready to acknowledge, when any extraordinary affliction or unforeseen accident befalls us, that it comes from God. In seasons of sorrow, or of grievous sickness, nothing is commoner than to hear the sufferer say, "It is the will of God, and I must bow to it." Now though this is good and right, as far as it goes, it does not go far enough. It is like the fault of the Syrians, who said, "Jehovah is God of the hills; but he is not God of the valleys." (1 Kings xx. 28.) So we are apt to speak and think of the Lord our God, as if he were God only of death, and sickness, and the greater visitations or escapes of life, but not God of the daily wants and common business of our calling. The Lord is God of the small things, just as truly as he is God of the great things. He orders and appoints and controls them all, as seems to him most fitting. If we were duly aware of this, we should recognise the voice of God and see his hand in our calling and station. Therefore, instead of wishing to be something different from what we are, we should be satisfied that he has placed us all in the stations best suited to our characters. We, my friends, live here away from the world, and in comparative obscurity.

Shall we repine thereat? No: it was God who set us here. Let us feel grateful to him for having sheltered us from the cares and temptations of more exposed spots, and be careful to make our light shine in a dark place. Others are raised to eminence, or born to live amid the bustle of the world. Shall they say within themselves, "We could serve God better somewhere else, with fewer cares to distract us, and fewer temptations to assail us?" No: they too must recollect that they are set to be lights upon a hill, by the same hand which has set us in the valley. They cannot change, they ought not to wish to change their station, any more than we ought to wish to change ours. Let each endeavour to do God's will, by filling his own station; if it be lowly, with contentment, if it be lofty, with humility: and the higher they are placed, the more careful let them be to make their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven.

Thus have I set before you the duty of sacrificing our wills to the will of God, not merely by doing his will, but by suffering his will, with faith and submission and contentment. It only remains for me to speak to you of the measure and degree in which God's will ought to be done by us,—namely, as it is done in heaven. The measure which Christ lays down for us is always an infinite measure, and the pattern is always a heavenly pattern. As Moses was commanded to make the tabernacle for the children of Israel in all things according to the pattern shewn to him in the mount, so we too are to frame the tabernacle of our christian life, and all things belonging thereto, according to the perfect model of heaven. We are to pray and to strive, that God's will may be done on earth as it is done in heaven. That is, we are to do it, as the angels do it, wholly, readily, cheerfully, and out of love to God. We are to do it wholly; for who can fancy an angel leaving any part

of his errand unperformed? We are to do it readily: for they are winged messengers, and run swift as thought to do God's bidding. We are to do it cheerfully, and with the hearts of angels, which are the abodes of joy and gladness. The mere doing God's will is little. The devils themselves, we may be sure, will be constrained to go as far as that. Only, while the angels do it with joy, and find all their happiness in doing it, the evil spirits do it unwillingly, and would fain shake it off if they could. So that, unless we bring our hearts to do God's will cheerfully, we cannot be said to do it as the angels do it, we cannot be said to do it as it is done in heaven. Above all we must do it out of love to God, for his glory, and not for our own. Glory to God in the highest, was the song of the angels at our Saviour's birth. The glory of God then is their great object; the love of God is their chief motive. It is only by the union of love with duty, that the will of God can be done as it is in heaven, where he rules in the sight of all, and issues his commands as it seems good to his eternal wisdom. The angels leave their places before the sapphire throne at God's bidding. They are his servants, and run to and fro whithersoever he sends them: and they go joyfully, deeming it a blessing to be charged with the least of his commands. Have we anything of this feeling about us? Do not say that it is above the measure of earth, that flesh and blood cannot know it. Many a good soldier has felt in this manner toward a great and beloved commander: many a loyal subject has so felt toward his king. And is not God our King? Is not the Captain of our salvation our commander? Let us feel toward him as his subjects and soldiers, happy to be employed by him, ready to obey him, active in his service, but at the same time prepared to endure hardships, to stand still at our post, to bear the taunts and reproaches of the enemy, whenever he orders us to do so. I

once read a story of a great captain, who after a battle was talking over the events of the day with his officers. He asked them, who had done best that day? Some mentioned one man who had fought very bravely, some another. "No," (said he,) "you are all mistaken: the best man in the field to-day was a soldier, who had his arm lifted up against an enemy, but who, on hearing the trumpet sound a retreat, checked himself, and dropped his arm without striking the blow. That perfect and ready obedience to the will of his general is the noblest thing that has been done to-day." Think over this story, my brethren; endeavour to obey God in all things, as that soldier obeyed his general; and you will find out in time what our Saviour meant by commanding us to pray that God's will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

He meant what he himself did. For, as by coming down from his glory to take our nature upon him, he shewed how earth might be lifted up into heaven, so by his activity in doing, and by his meekness in suffering God's will, he shewed how his Father's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven. Look at his diligence in doing that will, which was so great that he had not time so much as to eat: look at his devotion to it, which made the doing it meat and drink to him: think how careful he was to set forth and exalt, not his own glory, but the glory of him that sent him: call to mind the lowliness and patience, and the readiness to suffer as well as to do his Father's will, which he shewed throughout his blessed passion, so that even in the moment of that fearful agony the only cry that burst from his troubled spirit was, "Father, not my will, but thine be done!" Such was the example he left us, that we might walk in his steps both in our doing and in our praying. Remember therefore, that when you pray to God that his will may be done, you pray the very prayer which our Lord prayed. Remember that, when you pray that it may be

done on earth as it is done in heaven, you are in fact praying that you may be enabled to do it as perfectly as Jesus Christ did: for he came down from heaven. Take him for your model: and, as he came down to shew you how God's will should be done, so will the Holy Ghost come down, if you pray for him, and enable you to do it. So long as your lives are continued to you, God will be with you on earth; and death itself will not separate you. Rather will it unite you to the Godhead by new and closer bonds. For Christ will then lift you up, and take you to himself, that, where he is, you may be also, beholding his glory, partaking in his joys, and continuing to do the work which you began on earth, continuing to do God's will, but without the hindrance and alloy of human weakness and earthly imperfections, in the eternal peace of heaven.

XXXVII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: FIFTH PART.
DAILY BREAD.

LUKE xi. 3.

Give us day by day our daily bread.

THE Lord's Prayer, I have already told you, may be divided into four chief parts. The first part is the address, or invocation; in which we call upon God as our heavenly Father, and try, as it were, to catch his gracious ear. The second part consists of three petitions to God,—such as it befits loving children and dutiful subjects to make,—for the advancement of his honour, and the shewing forth of his glory,—that his name may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done as perfectly and readily and heartily on earth, as it is done in heaven. Having already spoken to you of these two parts, I will now go on to the third part, which is made up of petitions for the relief of our own necessities and wants both in body and soul. There is a petition in it for food, a petition for pardon, a petition to be kept out of temptation, a petition to be preserved from evil of every kind. In the present sermon we will confine ourselves to the first of these, the petition for food: Give us day by day our daily bread.

These words are very plain and simple: yet what a depth of meaning lies on their very surface! How much may we gather from them! how much may we learn from them! Almost every word supplies a lesson.

In the first place, we may all learn, from this petition of the Lord's Prayer, to look on everything that we enjoy as the gift of God,—a gift we are humbly to ask for, as regularly as the day comes. All, I say, may learn this. For our Lord makes no distinction about the offering up of this prayer. He does not say, that the poor are to make this petition, and that those who are well off in the world need not. He does not say that only those who are old, or infirm, or out of employment, and who therefore cannot support themselves, are to ask God for their daily bread. But he says to all,—to rich as well as poor,—to those who are earning their livelihood by their labour, or who are living on their means, just as much as to those who depend entirely on others,—nobleman and pauper, he says to all alike, "When ye pray, say, Give us day by day our daily bread."

This may perhaps sound a hard saying to the wealthy and proud man; and he might easily be tempted to think within himself,—"What need can there be for my asking God to give me my daily bread, when I have plenty of everything already?" But to such a man I would answer, —If you have plenty of everything, who gave you that plenty? Did not God give it you? And cannot the same God take it away from you, whenever he thinks fit? Is he not for ever shewing that he can make poor, just as easily as he makes rich? that he can throw a man down from a high station, just as suddenly as he raises him up to it? This is not a matter that calls for any great stretch of faith: your memory, if you look into it, will prove to you that such is the case. Are you a merchant? Call to

mind how many merchants and traders and dealers of all kinds, who were thriving amain a short time back, are now become bankrupt? Are you a farmer of land, or owner of it? Remember the distress and dismay that from time to time weighs down the landholders of England. How many persons who have passed for prosperous, and who perhaps have thought themselves as firm and as deeply rooted as the trees on their estates, have been suddenly swept away? And may it not be so again? Who keeps off the seasons of calamity, in which hundreds awake in the morning, believing themselves rich and flourishing, and by sunset are brought down to beggary? who keeps off such fearful seasons from sweeping us away too, as many better men have been swept away before? Who, I ask, prevents all this, but God? Think of the cold rainy summers, when the husbandman sows his seed in vain. Think of the distress which may be caused in a whole neighbourhood by the stoppage of a single bank. Think of the losses which men so often meet with from the carelessness, the dishonesty, the misfortunes of their friends and agents: to say nothing of those manifold casualties and accidents which so often come unexpectedly athwart the plans of such as put their trust in their own wisdom.

I might add, that there is yet another way of parting the man of substance and his possessions. Instead of taking his house and land from him, God can easily take him from his house and land. Most of you must remember our Saviour's parable of the rich man, who said within himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." You must remember too how all this ended. "God said to him, Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose will those things be?" For when a man dies he can carry nothing away with him. Death tears him away from his

money: and he is forced to leave it behind him, it may be for a stranger, or perhaps for a spendthrift to squander.

Since there are so many ways then in which a rich man and his money may be parted,—by death, by losses in trade, by bad seasons, by accidents of divers kinds, by the misconduct or mischances of others,—it is plain that the rich man is just as truly a pensioner on his heavenly Father, as the poorest who lives from hand to mouth. He is a pensioner on God to the full amount of his prosperity: and the continuance of his pension, the continuance of his prosperity, depends wholly on God's will. He had no claim to his wealth at the first: but God gave it to him of his own good pleasure. He has no claim or title to it now; but God continues it to him of the same good pleasure: and whenever God sees fit, he can and will take it all away. Surely then, in proportion as our money increases, our feeling of our utter dependence on God ought also to increase and grow stronger: and our prayers should become more frequent, and more pressing, that God will teach us to put our money to its right use, so that it may indeed prove a blessing to us and not a snare.

But if even those, who according to outward appearance have plenty of goods in store, ought to pray for their daily bread, great reason have they to do the same who live by their own industry. For if you had not health and strength to labour, what would become of the stoutest man amongst you? Yet who gave you your health and your strength? or who keeps you in the free use of it? You know, it is God, who preserves you in health and strength: and in giving you the power of earning your bread, he gives you the bread itself; just as a man who gave you money to buy your food, might be said to give you the food. So that all, whether rich or poor,—whether living on their own means, or supporting themselves by their labour, or supported by

the charity of others,—all of us depend upon God: all have equal reason, when we pray, to say, Give us this day our daily bread.

This then is the first lesson for us to learn from the text, the lesson of our entire dependence on our heavenly Father for all the good things of this life: and this is a lesson which we ought to learn by heart, as the phrase is. We must not be content to say, "Yes, it is very true, we do depend upon God,"—and then think no more about it: we must try to gain such a lively feeling of this truth, and so to work it into our minds, that it may give a colour and character to all our views of the present and the future. This is St. James's precept: "Go to, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and stay there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. Instead whereof ye ought to say, If the Lord will, ye shall live, and do this, or that." That is, in all your plans, in all your doings, you ought to take God into account. As the sailor says he will sail on such a day, wind and weather permitting,—not using these as words of course, but meaning what he says, and well knowing that, if the weather is rough and the wind in his teeth, he cannot put out to sea; so should we say sincerely and heartily to ourselves, whenever we purpose to do anything, "If God pleases, I will do so and so; and if it does not please God, it shall not please me." You will not easily guess, without making the trial, how free of the world and all its concerns a man becomes, by forming this habit of referring all things to God, and looking for everything to his good pleasure. It does not lead us to sloth, as some might fancy. The good Christian is just as industrious as other men: but he is industrious unto God. He does not look for miracles to be wrought, in order that he may eat the bread of idleness. He knows that, if he does not work,

neither shall he eat. He knows that it is his duty to provide for his household. Whatever his business may be, he follows it with a sober, steady diligence, not from covetousness, but to the end that, after providing for his own wants, and for those of his family, he may have something to give to him that needeth.

But perhaps you may ask, What then is the great difference between the Christian, who trusts in God, and the man of the world, who trusts to himself? seeing that both of them have to work for their livelihood, and to work just as hard the one as the other: so that in this respect the Christian does not seem to have any advantage over his ungodly neighbour. True: so far as work goes, the Christian certainly has no advantage. But in other things he has many and great advantages. He is comparatively free from cares. "Cast all your cares upon God" (saith St. Peter, 1, v. 7); "for he careth for you." The Christian does so: and it gives him ease of spirit: while the worldly-minded are always labouring under a heavy load of thought and care. You know how easy it is for a man to entangle himself in the affairs of this world; and how we are naturally led on to plunge deeper and deeper in them, almost without perceiving it, till we get into the midst of so many troubles and anxieties, that, like travellers who have lost their way in a thick dark wood, we can see nothing but the things close about us, and can hardly catch a glance of heaven. But no evil of this sort can befall a man who refers all his plans to God. The habit of doing so is quite enough to save him from such a danger. For while a man consecrates all his plans to God, and gives him the first place in all his schemes, and tries to keep him ever before his eyes, how is it likely that he should ever lose sight of him? Even if, in looking after his business, he does lose sight of God for a moment, he straightway perceives his loss. He misses the light and

comfort of God's presence, just as an Indian would miss the cheering warmth of the sun in one of our dark November fogs. This leads him to trace his steps back again, out of the thick wood of business, into the free sunshine of God's presence. Instead of giving up his God for his business, he narrows his business, that it may not withdraw him from his God.

In this too he takes a lesson from the Lord's Prayer. For inasmuch as the danger of forgetting God under the stress of worldly business, if we plunge into it blindfold, is very great, and the punishment denounced against us, if we do forget God, is very terrible and certain, our Saviour, beside this general security arising from the habit of referring all things to God, has furnished us in the text with another security, by teaching us what we are to pray, and accordingly what we are to wish for. We are not to pray for a great heap of riches, for a great mountain of prosperity, to be thrown upon us all at once; for perchance the mountain might bury us under its weight: but we are to pray merely for our daily bread. Not only are we to bear in mind that we are wholly dependent upon God: we must not even wish it to be otherwise. We should be content to be fed by his ordinary providence, just as Elijah was fed by the ravens, that brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; or just as the children of Israel were fed in the wilderness by the manna, which was given them from day to day. Such is the spirit which Christ would foster in us, a spirit of such complete trust, of such heavenly freedom from all anxiety, that, as long as God supplies our present wants, we are to rely on him for all beyond, and not to trouble him with so much as a prayer about the future, so far as concerns this world's goods. When we pray for heavenly blessings, for the coming of God's kingdom, for the doing of God's

will, we are to pray without stint or limit: when we pray for the goods of this world, we are to ask for our daily bread. Were Christians really and truly animated by a spirit of this kind, it would be just as impossible for them to lose themselves in the cares of this world as for a traveller to lose himself under a single tree. In a wood of trees he may lose himself; and so may the Christian lose himself in a wood of business: therefore Christ, to save us from this danger, warns us in his prayer to keep out of the wood, and to be content with the shelter of the single tree.

Observe, too, what it is we are to pray for. Not for delicate food, or fine clothes, or a large house: no, we are to ask for bread. Now what are we to understand by this word *bread?* Surely not a crust of bread alone. For this plain reason,—that there are other things as needful for our bodies as bread itself. What should we do without clothes to cover us, or a roof to put our heads under at night? We may be sure that our Saviour did not mean us to disregard such things as these. Therefore, when he tells us to pray for bread, we may reasonably understand that petition as including all things which are really needful for our bodies. Accordingly St. Paul in his Epistle to Timothy writes as follows: "Having food and raiment let us be content. But they that will be rich," (they that are greedy of riches, and strive to get rich,) "fall into temptation and a snare. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Mark the apostle's words: people who are anxious to grow rich pierce themselves through with many sorrows. Our Lord, you may remember, compares the cares of this world to thorns. Like thorns, they pierce and wound and tear the hearts of those who lay up their treasure on earth. Would you escape these wounds? Shun the thorns. Keep

yourself free and far off from worldly cares. Lay up your treasures, lay up your hearts in heaven. According to the letter of the apostle's precept, according to the spirit of the text, having received your daily bread from God, having received food and raiment from him, and such other things as are necessary for the life and health of the body, therewith be content.

Now how many are there in every country who have received far more from God than this! How many by his gracious gift are not only enjoying the necessaries of life, but a number of comforts and conveniences! Nay, there is hardly a poor person in these parts of England who does not get what our great-grandfathers would have deemed to be luxuries. I will mention two of these,—tea and wheaten bread. If any one a hundred years ago had foretold that the time would come, when every cottage in England would have its teapot and its loaf of wheaten bread, he would have been laughed at as a foolish dreamer. Yet that time is come. Whether the people of England have bettered their condition by eating wheaten bread and drinking tea, instead of eating barley bread and drinking beer, as your great-grandfathers are said to have done, is another question. I only mention the change, to show you that even the poorest folks in the land nowadays enjoy what our forefathers used to look upon as luxuries. Nay, the bread which our Saviour himself ate, the bread which he taught his disciples to pray for, was not made of wheat, but rye.

Without saying more however on this point, thus much is plain,—that very many persons in the land have received the good things of this life from the hands of their heavenly Father in plentiful abundance. What then ought they, or what ought we,—for I too am one of those who are thus bountifully provided for,—what ought we to do? If we did as we ought, we should never repeat the Lord's Prayer, with-

out a feeling of thankfulness for having received so much more than our daily bread: and a blush of shame ought to come over us at the sound of the word bread, when we remember all that God has given to us, and the little gratitude we have shewn to him in return. Moreover we should not allow our abundance to swell and lift up our souls, and make us highminded, but should ever fear, remembering that the hand which has given us everything, can also take everything away. We too, more than all others, should feel ourselves bound to take no thought for the morrow. Seeing that God has already provided thus richly for us, we should trust wholly in that bounty, of which we have already had such experience. Above all should we beware lest we let our souls be weighed down to the earth by the blessings vouchsafed to us. To that end we should ever bear in mind that they are not our own, but God's, that our wealth is merely a loan with which we have been entrusted for the good of our brethren, and that, if we turn it away from its real purpose, to the pampering of our own appetites, we shall have a fearful account to render of the manner in which we have misused our stewardship.

But I said above, that God not only gives the rich man his riches; he also gives the poor man the means whereby he earns his bread. If any of you are skilled in any craft, it is God who gave you your skill. If any of you are strong to labour, God gave you your strength. But he has not given it to you in fee: you have no lasting right to it: you have not even a lease from year to year, nor from month to month, nor so much as from week to week: he only gives it to you from day to day: and there is no day, there is no minute of any day, when he may not take it away from you, if he pleases. If you live by the sight of your eyes, he may throw a curtain of darkness over your eyes. If you live by the work of your hands and legs, a stroke of palsy may take away the use

of them, and turn you into a helpless cripple. All of you then have reason to be lowly-minded, to beware of priding yourselves, whether on your cleverness, or on your strength, or on your health. All of you should ever bear in mind, that what God has graciously given you for the purpose of supporting yourselves and your families, must not be wasted in idleness and sloth, or in rioting and drunkenness: you should bear in mind, that you too will have to give account for the use of the talents which have been entrusted to you. Every day God gives you his gift anew. Every day then ought you to make him some return for that gift. Every day ought you to lay up something or other in that heavenly treasury, where God, for the sake of his blessed Son, allows you to lay up treasures which pass not away with the day, but will outlast the earth itself. Every day too ought you to bless God for the new gift he has vouchsafed to bestow on you: and when he thinks fit to take it away, you should remember that what he takes away is not yours, but his; so that you can have no plea to murmur or repine, seeing it is only of God's great bounty that he has let you keep it so long. Thus everything we have, whether it be riches, or skill, or strength, or health, becomes precious, because it is the gift of God, a gift too which God has given us to be employed in his service, in laying up treasures in heaven. Therefore it must not be abused, by being turned to unholy purposes, to the feeding of our carnal appetites, or to the laying up of treasures in hell. If your father gave you a very precious gift, you would not go and fling it before swine: yet, though every gift of God is more precious than any pearls, too many rush with theirs to the alehouse or the ginshop, or some other of the devil's styes, and make all haste to throw it to the swine to trample under foot. Be not so unwise, brethren: throw not your pearls before swine: throw not those precious pearls, your health and your strength,

—throw not your money, which, if you have more than you need, you may employ in the blessed work of relieving the wants of your brethren,—throw not pearls of such price before any of those foul swine,—gluttony and drunkenness, and the other lusts of the flesh.

Such is the meaning of the petition for our daily bread which we are taught to offer up in the Lord's Prayer; and such are the lessons it ought to teach us. The use of that prayer, I need hardly remark, is not to hinder us from using other prayers. As we are taught in Scripture in everything to make our desires known to God, there can be no doubt that we may innocently pray for many worldly goods, beside our daily bread. The farmer for instance may and ought to pray for God's blessing on his crops, that the land may yield him its increase. So too the merchant may and ought to pray to God to bless his merchandise; and the tradesman should pray to him to bless his trade. In short, every one of us, be our station and business what it may, is warranted by Scripture to recommend his plans and wishes to the care and protection of his heavenly Father. Only every petition of this kind must be offered up in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer, that is, with great thankfulness to Almighty God for having hitherto given us so much more than our daily bread, with great trust in his mercy, that he will continue to give us what he knows to be best for us, and with perfect resignation to his will, in the assurance that, when he does not grant our petition, it is only for one of two reasons, either because we have asked amiss, or because the thing we asked for would on the whole have done us harm, instead of good. He who prays for any earthly blessing in such a temper as this, prays for it in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer; and his prayer will be blessed to him, whether God grants it or refuses it. Remember then that we are authorised and encouraged, and commanded too, in

Scripture, to make our wants known to God. But one man's wants are not another man's wants: therefore each of us must present his own wants to God in his own private prayers. Christ in his prayer has only mentioned the one bodily want which all mankind have in common, bread, or food. In very hot countries the inhabitants need little clothing: in dry and warm climates the people can live and sleep in the open air a great part of the year without hurt. Nay, our Lord himself had not where to lay his head. In no country does a person need new clothes or a new house every day in the year. Jesus Christ therefore, in this his prayer which he meant for the daily use of people of all climates and countries, says nothing about clothes or houses. But there is one thing which everybody in every country has need of every day; and for this one thing we are taught to ask.

On the whole then, calling to mind how often in Scripture our christian life is compared to a journey and to a warfare, we shall not do ill in likening ourselves to soldiers on active service, who must not think of houses, but must be satisfied to sleep in tents, or even under the naked sky, when occasion calls for it; and who, when they have got their clothes, must take care of them, and not think of new ones, till those they have are worn out. But their daily rations, their daily food, they may expect and ask for; because without it they would be unable to bear up against the toils of war, and would faint and fall by the way. Thus we too, the soldiers of Jesus Christ, may humbly ask our heavenly Father and our Commander to give us each our daily bread; because without it our strength would droop, and our life would wither away, before we had finished the task which our God and Saviour has given us to do. Therefore, in praying for our daily bread we are in fact praying for life, and for such a portion of the necessaries of life, as

may support us through another day of the dangerous march toward the city of our Captain in heaven: we are praying that we may have all that is needful for us, in order that we may fight our way thither, until we are allowed to join our Lord, and to be with him for ever.

XXXVIII.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: SIXTH PART.

FORGIVENESS.

LUKE xi. 4.

> And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.

I ENDED my last sermon by reminding you of the comparisons so common in the Bible, in which our life is likened to a journey and to a warfare; and I told you, that, in praying to God for our daily bread, we are in fact praying to him for what is needful in order that we may have strength to reach the end of our journey, and to fight our way through all the hindrances that beset us, to the city of our Lord and Saviour. But suppose a man to be a wayfarer, whether a soldier or a traveller, what is the thing which above all others would encumber and fatigue him on his march? Assuredly a heavy weight, a great pack or load to carry, would be more against a man in a long journey than anything else one could mention. Many of you can lift a sack of wheat, and can carry it some little way. But think of being condemned to walk from here to Devizes, or rather from here to Bath, with a sack of wheat on your shoulder every day for a month together. How soon would the stoutest man among you break down under such a load!

He might contrive to stagger on a little way: but his strength before long would fail him; and if he did not drop his load it would crush him. Now sin,—when a man is in his right senses, when he knows whither he ought to be going,—is a weight on the soul, and presses it down, just as a weight on the back presses down the body. Many of you must have read or heard of poor Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress," how, after he had read awhile in a book given him by one Evangelist, that is, after he had studied the word of God, he felt a burthen on his back so heavy that almost bowed him to the earth. That burthen is an allegory to express the painful weight of sin, which is indeed a burthen to the awakened conscience, yea, a sore burthen too heavy for it to bear. When thus overweighted with the sense of guilt, how can the christian warrior march forward? Nay, under such a load, how can he act the soldier in the field? A man who fights, needs to be nimble and strong, and should have all his limbs free and unshackled. He must not go into battle tottering under a load: else a slight thrust will push him over, a slip will lay him on the ground.

Therefore our Lord, after teaching us to ask for food, to support through the toil of our daily christian march, and to carry us through the hardships of our daily christian warfare, bad us ask for the pardon of our sins; because, unless we are pardoned, we can neither fight nor march to good purpose. This is the second petition in that part of the Lord's Prayer which we are now considering, the second petition which our Lord commands us to offer up for ourselves: "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us."

While a sense of guilt is lying heavy on a man, I said, he cannot, at least he will not, serve God to good purpose. He will not move forward on the road to heaven: he will not stand

his ground against temptation. The children of this world indeed tell a different story. According to them the forgiveness of sins so freely offered to sinners in the New Testament only encourages men to sin on. And so it may some. There may be, and I fear there are, persons so wretched and so foolish, as to abuse the blessed doctrine of forgiveness through the blood of Christ, to the dishonour of God, and their own ruin. There may be, and I fear there are, persons who think to take advantage of God's mercy, and put off repenting year after year, saying to themselves, "We shall have time to repent by-and-by." Thus they go on, until God's judgment falls on them, and death overtakes them with all their sins unrepented of, and gives them over to judgment and to hell. What spirit can such persons be possessed by! Do they fancy that they can cheat God? Cannot they hear the voice of Scripture, which plainly declares that man cannot repent at will? Does not the Bible say plainly to men of this stamp,—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." (Jerem. xiii. 23.) Does not our own experience too shew the truth of this? Is it not the rarest of all things, to see a man, who has spent his life in sin and in forgetfulness of God, turn to God in good earnest in old age? You must have known many old people, some, I hope, religious, and some, I am afraid, irreligious. Now of those who really and truly died in the fear and love of God, after spending their latter days in his service, how many were converted and began to turn to God after they became old? Do you know three such? If you do, you know a great number. But I feel almost certain you can none of you recollect so much as three old persons, who died a godly death, after having lived ungodly till they grew old. If this be so, is it not a folly and a madness deserving stripes,—alas! what has a christian

minister to do with stripes?—let me rather say, deserving our pity and our prayers,—is it not a sad, pitiable folly, brethren, for a man to stake his soul on this desperate chance of a late repentance, after a life of sin and ungodliness?

But, though the doctrine of free forgiveness to all who sue to God for mercy through the blood of Christ may be thus perverted and abused, it is still a blessed and a holy doctrine, and is well fitted to make men holy. Were men no better than beasts or devils, it might encourage them to sin. But considering what the true nature of man is,—that he has a conscience to be aroused, and feelings to be touched, and affections to be won,—this doctrine of forgiveness ought to lead him, and does lead many, to God. Nothing can be more certain, than that sin cuts man off from God, and raises a bar which keeps him away. The Scripture compares it to a chain, which binds a man and holds him prisoner. Would you set the man free? You must break the chain: and that can only be done by forgiveness. If you ask me how sin is a chain, I answer, it is like a chain, because it hangs about a man, and clogs him, and hinders him from seeking God. None of us like to go to a person, to whom we know we have given just cause of offence. The sight of such a person is irksome to us: we feel awkward and ill at ease in his company: we stay away from him as much as we can: if we are forced to go to him, we feel it a relief to get away again. So it is between man and man: so too is it between man and God. While we believe God to be offended with us, while our consciences tell us that we are at variance with him, we cannot be at ease in his presence. We dare not think of him: we dare not pray to him: we get away from him as far as we can. This is no new effect of sin: it has been so from the beginning. After Adam and Eve had committed the first sin, by eating the forbidden fruit, we read, that they heard the

voice of the Lord God walking in the garden. Now mark what follows: "And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called to Adam, and said to him, Where art thou? And Adam said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." Naked he was indeed, with the worst of nakedness: his soul was naked: it was lying bare and open with the black stain of sin upon it: and Adam felt that it was so. This was the nakedness he was afraid of. He could not bear to feel the eye of God looking on that dark spot; so he went and hid himself. And do not sinners in the present day just the same? Do they not try to hide themselves from God in business, in pleasure, in revellings, in idle company? Do they not try all means in their power to fly from their own thoughts, and from their own conscience? Do they not hate and dread serious self-examination above all things? because they know that in such moments God causes his presence to be felt; and they are afraid to feel that God is looking on them. They cannot bear to tear the rag off from their festering sins: they cannot bear the torture of probing their hearts: they cannot abide the shame of seeing and knowing how bad their condition is. So they turn away from all serious thoughts of God in private, and from all serious talk about him with their neighbours. They shun all self-examination, and shut their eyes to their danger, with the desperate cowardice of a ruined man, who will not face a creditor, nor look into a bill, nor cast up an account-book. How must this end? How does it always end with those who dare not face their earthly creditors? Common sense and experience tell us: sooner or later in utter ruin. How then must such a course end with those who have God Almighty for their creditor? Reason and conscience unite

to tell us: sooner or later in utter ruin. The man who will not look into the state of his affairs in this world, must be ruined in this world: the man who will not look into the state of his soul, must be ruined for ever.

Here are two sad truths plainly made out, that the consciousness of being sinners keeps men away from God, and that, in keeping away from God, we keep away from happiness: in turning from him, we rush into ruin. How was this evil to be remedied? Looking at it with the eyes of a man, one should have said, there was no way. For the more men became sinners, the more need they had of God: yet the more they became sinners, the more afraid they were of coming to him. But God seeth not as man seeth; in the depths of his merciful wisdom he discovered a remedy for the evil. That remedy in one word is forgiveness. He has come to us in the person of his Son, and has called to us in the midst of our sinful courses, saying, "Why will ye die? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Only turn to me, and ye shall live." Return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you: return to our God, for he will abundantly pardon you. This is the plan which our Father had devised for melting the stubborn naughtiness of men's hearts. He has begun with offering them forgiveness. It is easy to see how that one offer wholly changes the state of the question. A God who offers us forgiveness is no longer a terrible God, whom we need be afraid to look upon. He comes to us in a character of mercy, bringing hopeful gifts. Nay, he comes to us in a human form, like one of ourselves, that we may be less frightened at him, and readier to listen to him. Above all, he comes to us as a suffering man, to move our pity, as a man suffering undeservedly for our sakes, to awaken our gratitude and love; that so all the gates of our hearts may be thrown open to him, and that he may enter and take possession of them the more easily.

Was I wrong then in saying that the offer of free forgiveness through Christ ought to lead sinners to God? So it does lead those who have sense enough to feel that they are sinners. He who is labouring and fainting under the burthen of his sins will creep to the cross of Christ to be rid of his burthen. But he who does not feel the lump of sin to be a deformity and a disgrace to him, he who does not desire to run the race set before him, and therefore does not feel the weight of those offences, which make him crawl, instead of running,—these men of course will not be anxious to be freed from a burthen which they do not feel: they will not be anxious for God's forgiveness; because they are not aware that they need it. The first lesson for us all to learn then is the evil and wickedness of sin. We must get a sense of our own unworthiness and guiltiness in the sight of God. Now this can only be done by a diligent study of the Bible, especially of the New Testament. Everything in the world about us is fitted to stupefy us, and to blind us to the true nature of sin. In the world it wears a mask and a disguise. But in God's book it appears without a mask: we may see it there in all its hideousness. It is spoken of there, as they speak of it in heaven, and as Christ will speak of it when he casts it into hell. Therefore it is only by a diligent study of the New Testament, and of other godly books, that a man can gain a right sense of his guiltiness in the sight of God. But you must read with both your eyes open, and must listen with both your ears open: and one eye must be turned inward on your own soul: one ear must be opened inward to the whispers of your conscience. When you meet with any of those awful threats, which are scattered through Scripture against every kind of sin, you must not say to yourselves, "That does not apply to me." Your first thought should be rather, "It does apply to me, and was set there to give me warning."

The effect of sin, we have seen, is to frighten us away from God, to make us hide ourselves from him, as Adam and Eve hid themselves from him, to make us fly away from him, as Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord to Tarshish. Thus has it been more or less with all such as have had to struggle and to squeeze through the narrow gate which separates the ways of death and life. Every one, with the exception of the few who have had the happiness to enter the kingdom of heaven as little children, and to abide therein,—every one who has allowed the burthen of unrepented sin to grow upon him, must have felt at the outset of his christian march how that burthen encumbered him and pressed him down: he must have felt too that, had it not been for the hope of being delivered from his burthen sooner or later, he should never have had the courage to persevere. It is hope, the hope of being forgiven for Christ's sake, the hope, if we turn to God, of being received mercifully, as the prodigal son was received by his forgiving father,—it is this firm hope that bears a man up through, the dark and dreary season of repentance. For repentance, true repentance, is oftentimes a dark and stormy season. Were it not for the unfailing promises of Christ which, like the rainbow in the clouds, are a sure sign to the sinner that his trials shall have an end, and that the flood of his sorrows and iniquities shall not swell so as to drown his soul,—were it not for those comfortable promises which Jesus Christ in his Gospel makes to all such as will truly turn to him, many a sinner's heart would fail; he would say within himself "This repentance is too painful for me: I will go back to my former sins." Not that the service of sin is easy and pleasant, least of all to the awakened sinner. On the contrary, no sooner does he return to it, than his bondage galls and frets him. But as a man in a fever tosses and turns about from side to side, seeking rest for his body, and

finding none, so would it be with the awakened sinner, were he not supported by hope during the trial and struggle of his change. The terrors of the Lord would frighten him into repentance: and then the weariness of repentance would carry him back to sin. So the poor wretch would be driven backward and forward, never resting, yet never getting on. This is even now the state of many, in spite of God's promises: and it would be the state of all if Christ had not saved us from it. But his promises and invitations are so clear and gracious, that many a poor soul is encouraged by them to persevere in the work of repentance, painful as it may be: until at length God causes his mercy to shine forth on him, like a sunbeam from a stormy cloud, and speaks peace to his wounded spirit: and so the sinner knows himself to be forgiven, and hastens on his way rejoicing. In a word, as it happened to the paralytic man, so does it happen to us. When Christ had said to him, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; arise and walk," he arose, and took up his bed, and went to his home. Thus we too are naturally palsied and lame and halt with sin: but when Jesus says to us, "Repent, and your sins shall be forgiven," we too are strengthened and encouraged to arise and walk in the paths of righteousness. We leave our burthen of sin behind us, and take up our bed, and carry it along with us: that is, in our duty we find our rest.

Let none of you say within himself, "This is all very well for gross and open sinners: but it does not apply to decent, well-behaved persons, such as I am." Remember that a man may sleep upon his burthen, instead of carrying it; and then to be sure he does not feel it. Yes, he may so sleep, and may even dream that he is moving onward: but he who moves only in a dream, will not make much way. Besides his dream must come to an end: he must awake at last. Does not St. John tell us, that "if a man saith he has

no sin he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him?" Does not St. James say, "In many things we all offend?" Surely these texts are plain enough. He who has never felt the burthen of his sins, and his need of pardon, will do well to ponder and consider them. Want of feeling is no proof of life and health, but the contrary. If one of my hands were benumbed, and had lost all feeling, I should know something ailed it. Were I speaking of it to a neighbour, I should probably say, "My hand is just as if it were dead." Now this is the very way the Bible speaks of those whose souls are not awake to the evil of their nature: it says of them that they are "*dead* in trespasses and sins." Be not deceived in this matter. Do not mistake a palsied conscience for a healthy one, a dead soul for a live one: do not fancy that, because you feel nothing, you have therefore no burthen on your backs. Rather let your fears be aroused by this very thing, that you do feel nothing. It is a symptom quite dangerous enough to call for all your watchfulness. Set the looking-glass of Scripture right before you, to look yourselves well over therein. To that scriptural self-examination join diligent and hearty prayer. Pray to God to deliver you from the fumes of self-conceit, which prevent your seeing yourselves clearly. Pray to him to shew you your sins. You will find an excellent prayer for that purpose in the last verses of the 139th Psalm, which you may use with a very slight alteration: "Search me, O God, that I may know my heart: try me, that I may know my thoughts. Shew me if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting." Thus would I have you endeavour to quicken your consciences, that your sense of your misdeeds may carry you with double eagerness to your Saviour,—and that, feeling all the weight and burthen of your sins, you may long the more to be freed from it, and may thus perceive how gracious the Lord is, in com-

manding us, when we pray, to say, Forgive us our sins: because, unless we had the hope of obtaining forgiveness, we could never draw nigh to God.

But it is not simple forgiveness, that our Lord has here taught us to ask for. He has been pleased to join a condition to this prayer: so that, every time we repeat the prayer for forgiveness, we are to repeat the condition also. We are not to say, "Forgive us our sins," without adding, "For we too forgive every one that is indebted to us." These are the words as they stand in St. Luke: you are all aware that they are not exactly the same as those you are in the habit of using. You have been taught to say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." In the text we read, "Forgive us our sins; for we too forgive every one that is indebted to us:" while in St. Matthew it stands thus, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." These little differences may serve to shew you how unimportant the words are in comparison with the meaning and the spirit. Whether we say trespasses, or whether we say sins, or whether we say debts, the meaning is just the same: and the meaning is what it really signifies. Perhaps it was to keep us in mind of this, and to prevent our making an idol of the words of his prayer, and using them as a spell or a charm, without giving heed to their meaning,—that our Saviour varied those words, and said, "Forgive us our debts," when he taught the people in his Sermon on the Mount, and "Forgive us our sins," when he taught them the second time in St. Luke. Our prayer, as it stands in the Prayerbook, is probably taken from the old version of the Lord's Prayer, used in early ages in this country.

Now surely if any rule, if any motive could keep us all in peace and love with each other, it would be that in our daily prayers we are to declare to God, that we have for-

given every one who has offended us, and that we only ask for mercy ourselves in proportion as we shew mercy to others: Forgive us, as we forgive them. Shall we dare then to come before the God of truth, the God who knoweth all things, who sees into our hearts, and reads our very thoughts, —shall we dare come before such a God with a falsehood in our mouths? Shall we lie to God in our prayers? Who can be bold enough to do this? Yet, unless we do it, we must either give over asking for pardon, and must depart altogether from God, and be content to remain under his wrath, or we must ourselves clean forgive every one who has offended us. Conceive a revengeful, unforgiving man repeating this prayer, which you all, I hope, repeat daily,— conceive a man with a heart full of wrath against his neighbour, with a memory which treasures up the little wrongs and insults and provocations he fancies himself to have received from that neighbour,—conceive such a man praying to God most High, to forgive him his trespasses, as he forgives the man who has trespassed against him. What in the mouth of such a man do these words mean? They mean . . . but that you may more fully understand their meaning, I will turn them into a prayer, which we will call the prayer of the unforgiving man: "O God, I have sinned against thee many times, from my youth up until now. I have often been forgetful of thy goodness: I have not duly thanked thee for thy mercies: I have neglected thy service: I have broken thy laws: I have done many things utterly wrong against thee. All this I know: and besides this doubtless I have committed many secret sins, which in my blindness I have failed to notice. Such is my guiltiness, O Lord, in thy sight: deal with me, I beseech thee, even as I deal with my neighbour. He has not offended me one-tenth, one hundredth part as much as I have offended thee: but he has offended me very grievously; and I cannot

forgive him. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. He has been very ungrateful to me,—though not a tenth, not a hundredth part as ungrateful as I have been to thee: yet I cannot overlook such base and shameful ingratitude. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. I remember and treasure up every little trifle, which shews how ill he has behaved to me. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him. I am determined to take the very first opportunity of doing him an ill turn. Deal with me, I beseech thee, O Lord, as I deal with him." Can anything be more shocking and horrible than such a prayer? Is not the very sound of it enough to make one's blood run cold? Yet this is just the prayer which the unforgiving man offers up every time he repeats the Lord's Prayer. For he prays to God to forgive him in the same manner in which he forgives his neighbour. But he does not forgive his neighbour: so he prays to God not to forgive him. God grant that his prayer may not be heard! For he is praying a curse on his own head.

Such is the wisdom of the way, such the strength of the motive, by which our Lord has endeavoured to establish peace and good-will among his people. He has taught us that we cannot be forgiven, unless we on our part forgive all our brethren. Thus he has bound heavenly peace and earthly peace together by the golden chain of prayer. We cannot have, we are not even to ask for heavenly peace, for peace with God, unless our hearts bear us witness that we have done our utmost to keep at peace with every man, yea, even with those who have ill-used us, with those who have spoken evil of us, with those who have borne themselves proudly towards us, or have affronted and insulted us, or have done us any sort of wrong.

Perhaps however you will ask me, what is meant by this forgiveness? how are we to forgive our brethren? The

answer is plain enough: even as we wish to be forgiven by God. The same kind of forgiveness, the same degree of forgiveness, which you desire of God, are you to shew to each other. What that is, let your own hearts tell you, your fears of hell, into which God might justly cast you for your sins, your hopes of heaven, which God for his Son's sake will throw open to the penitent and forgiving: let these tell you how you ought to forgive your neighbour. Or shall I rather send you to the old saying, which contains as much mercy and as much wisdom as was ever put by man into three words? the saying, Forgive and forget. Forgiving and forgetting is the pardon which we desire from God: therefore forgiving and forgetting is the pardon which we are to grant to man.

But some will perhaps say,—at least many have said,—I have heard it said many times,—"Well, I will forgive, but I cannot forget." What! is our memory then better than God's? For he can forget, and has promised to forget, the sins of his people. Thus he saith by the prophet Jeremiah (xxxi. 34): "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Shall God say this of our sins, which are so great that they rise up over our heads? and shall we not be able to say as much of the petty offences of our neighbour? petty, not in themselves, it may be, yet trifling, insignificant, small as a little mote, when compared with our great beams and mountains of sin against God. But what does God mean when he says, he "will remember our sins no more?" He means, that he will never think of them, and never mention them again. Cannot we do as much? Cannot we, in looking at our neighbour's behaviour toward us, look at the better part of it, rather than the worse? Cannot we let our thoughts dwell on those points which make for him, or at least which tend to excuse him, while we turn away from those parts of his conduct which render his fault

uglier and more glaring? Cannot we take account of all those matters in our behaviour to him, which may have seemed to him in any degree harsh, or unkind, or angry, or disrespectful, or overbearing? It is not necessary that we should have meant them to be so. You know how easily mistakes arise, how easily the same thing may be construed in two different ways. Cannot we take account of the ill-judged advice of those false friends, who so often fan the flame of discord, instead of throwing water on it and extinguishing it? If we made due allowance for all these things, our neighbour's offences would dwindle very much in our eyes: and all these allowances we ought in mere justice and fairness to make, whenever we think about his conduct. But the best way is not to think of it at all, still less to speak of it: for, if we refrain from speaking of it, the remembrance will soon die away from our minds. It is by angry words that people are wont to swell the fire of their anger, and to make it burn more fiercely. Take away the fuel, and in time it will go out.

This, my brethren, is the forgiveness that we must shew to others. We must not only forgive their offences against us, but we must forget them. We must never speak of them: we must try never to think of them: we must look about for what may be said in excuse of them. Not only must we abstain from rewarding others evil for evil, from shewing them any unkindness: we must be just as ready to shew them every kindness in our power, as if they had never offended us. We must try to overcome them by kindness, to melt their hearts by pouring benefits upon them. For this is the forgiveness which we crave from God. We not only desire that God should forgive us, not only that he should blot out our offences, but also that for the sake of his blessed Son, he should receive us into favour, and give us the good things of heaven.

XXXIX.

THE LORD'S PRAYER: SEVENTH PART.

TEMPTATIONS AND EVILS.

LUKE xi. 4.

And lead us not into temptation: but deliver us from evil.

OF the petitions contained in the third part of the Lord's Prayer,—the petitions we offer up for ourselves,—we have already considered two; in which we utter our wishes to God with regard to the present and the past. For the present; we pray God to give us our daily bread, which means, as our Catechism teaches us, all such things as are strictly needful both for our souls and bodies. As to the past, we have besought him to forgive us our trespasses, and to deliver us from the weight and burthen of our sins. Having thus provided for the present and the past, it only remains for us to entreat our heavenly Father to take care of us and help us through the future. This our Saviour teaches us to do in the last two petitions of his prayer: "Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil." These petitions, you will easily see, look to the future, the time to come: just as the petition for our daily bread looks to the time now present, and the petition for forgiveness to that which is gone by.

The christian soldier,—to use the comparison already employed more than once in these sermons,—the christian soldier, we will suppose, has received his rations; he has been freed from the heavy load, under which he had groaned and tottered; he has been fed and armed and eased of his burthen by the Spirit and the promises of God; and he is now ready to set out on his day's march toward heaven. But the march lies through an enemy's country, and is beset with dangers, concealed and open. There are traps and snares and pitfalls for the unwary: there are the assaults of our great foe, and all the hindrances of every kind that he can stir up, to scare us back or stop us on our march, or at least to make us slacken our pace and loiter in our progress toward holiness. These assuredly are great dangers: so in order to prepare us for them, that we may not run into them blindly and rashly, our Lord has taught us to pray daily, not to be led into temptation, and to be delivered from evil. Thus the text divides itself into two parts; first a petition against temptation, by which we may understand the snares and pitfalls placed along our road,—and next a petition against evil, that is, against all those more open dangers to which the christian soldier is exposed. Sin is evil, and the only real evil. The devil is evil, and the father of it. Wicked men are evil; for they do evil, and forward it, and set an example of it, and entice others to it. From all these, and from all the hurt of every kind which they can do to our souls, and bodies, we pray our heavenly Father to preserve us, when we say, Deliver us from evil.

Our first prayer to God then with regard to the time to come is, that he will not lead us into temptation. That God will not lead us into temptation! What can that mean? Can it mean that God has any pleasure in tempting us, in putting stumblingblocks and pitfalls across our road to heaven? Not so, my brethren: harbour no such thought

against your God. He has expressly taught us by his apostle, St. James, that he tempts no man: "but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed." So it is not God that tempts us, but our own lusts, our own evil passions and desires and propensities: these tempt us, and entice us, and if we listen to them, draw us into sin. Every man, the apostle tells us, is tempted by his own lust, that is, by his own particular evil bent or propensity. All men have not the same evil bent, the same wrong bias. All are not disposed alike to the same wickedness: but some are more easily tempted by one thing, some by another. Some love their ease: some are eager after business: some are fond of pleasure: some prize money above everything: some care little about money in comparison with power: some again are vain, and wish above all things to be admired, to be thought handsome, or clever, or learned, or wise. Some are hot and passionate; while others are sullen: some are sluggish and fearful; while others are rash and headstrong. In a word, every man, according to his temper and character, is liable to some particular temptation; just as, according to the constitution of our bodies, we are each of us liable to some particular disease. All men, you know, are not of the same habit of body. Some are consumptive, and liable to disorders of the lungs. Others are of a full habit, and have most to fear from fevers. In the same way our souls are not all equally prone to fall into the same sin: but every one, as St. James tells us, has his own lust, his own failing, his own weak point, which puts him in especial danger.

Perhaps you would like an example or two, to explain this and show the truth of it. There are plenty of such in the Bible. Solomon, in spite of all his wisdom, was drawn away by his love of women: that was his temptation; and it is one by which millions and millions have fallen.

Righteous Lot was betrayed into shameful crimes by the love of strong drink: that was his temptation; and you all know how many are beset by it, and how easily those who give way to it roll from one sin to another. Balaam again, all prophet as he was, was ruined by the love of money: that was his temptation; and by the very same Satan is every day catching thousands of souls. Here we have three men, highly and wonderfully gifted, who in other respects had great excellencies, each drawn away by his own lust. So that, since every man has such a root of evil in him, you may easily understand how much to be wished it is that we should not be placed in situations where that root would be encouraged to come up, and gather strength, and grow into a stem and branches of iniquity. It would be a great misfortune, you know, to a man with weak lungs, to call him to live in a cold, bleak air. So would it to a man with weak eyes, to fix him in a situation which required much study by candle-light. Now it is to the full as dangerous for the soul of the ambitious man, to be put into the road which leads to high stations, as it can be for the lungs of the consumptive man, to give him a house on a bleak hill. So is it just as dangerous for the soul of a man like Balaam, to have much to do with money-bags, as it could be for the sight of a weak-eyed man to spend his nights in hard study.

What great reason then have we all to pray earnestly to God, for ourselves, and for our friends and relations, that he would not place either them or us in situations to call forth our evil propensities, and rouse them to mischievous action! At present, it may be, they are asleep within us; because God has placed us in a humble station, where the soil is ill-suited to the evil root; so that it lies almost dead, and only shews itself in our wishes, in our fancies, and in our dreams. But were he to transplant us hence to some other soil more kindly to that root of evil, what a change for the worse

might ensue! Our evil passion might take fire; the evil root might sprout up; the lust, which has hitherto been kept down and been barren, might conceive, and bring forth sin and death. All this might happen to any of us: and it would happen, I am convinced, to many, if God did not keep them out of harm's way. One often hears people saying, "How I wish I were this!—I wish I were that.—I should make such a figure, I should go on so fast, in such a line of life." One often hears people talking in this way, both of themselves and others. My belief, however is, that God knows how to choose our places for us better than we do. Whenever we see a strong desire of this sort thwarted, whenever we find a person, not mad with conceit, thinking himself fitted to fill a higher station in life, yet set in a lower, we may well suppose that God has some good reason for this. Perhaps that very thirst after fame, after rank, after riches or honours, which is now stunted by God's providence to a mere wish, may betoken a feverish and disordered state of soul, which, if it came to be pampered by opportunity, instead of being kept low and curbed, would get ahead and gain a mastery over the man, and hurl him into everlasting ruin. For as lust brings forth sin, so does sin, when wrought into act and deed, bring forth death.

This then is one thing that our Lord means, by commanding us to pray to God not to lead us into temptation. We are to pray that he will not place us in situations favourable to our bad passions, and unfavourable to our good principles. Thus much we may humbly hope that God will mercifully grant us. But though this is a very important part of this petition, it is only a part. The petition not to be led into temptation embraces a great deal more than this. For beside that root of evil, which I have been speaking of, and which we will call the taproot, every man has sundry lesser shoots of the same family. Such are the many

infirmities of the temper, haste, heat, coldness, carelessness, indolence; to say nothing of all the frailties belonging to the flesh. Now these are faults which pertain to man as man: they need no particular situation to ripen them, but will spring up almost everywhere. Whether we are lords or peasants, whether masters or servants, whether learned or ignorant, whether townsfolk or countryfolk: we must have tempers, we must have bodily appetites: and those tempers and appetites will expose us to trial more or less. Greatly then does it behove us to pray daily not to be led into temptation, seeing that our daily walk in life is hedged with so many dangers. We may fall in divers ways by our tempers: we may fall in divers ways by our bodies. We may fall by prosperity, which hardens and puffs up: we may fall by adversity, which sours, and breeds discontent and envy. In praying therefore against temptation, we ask God to preserve us from all these downfalls; or rather we ask him not to place us in circumstances, where our particular infirmities would be tried. For instance, in the mouth of a hot-tempered man, it would be a petition against everything that might stir his anger. In the mouth of a timid person, it would be a petition against anything that might frighten him out of the right path. In the mouth of the obstinate, it would be a petition against whatever might foster their stubbornness; and so on.

We must not flatter ourselves however that this part of the petition will be granted in its full extent. We must not flatter ourselves that God will enable us to go through life without being exposed to any sort of temptation. For this world is a place of trial and discipline. Now without some kind of temptation we should have no trials, and no opportunity of exercising several of the christian graces. It is only in war and in battle, that the soldier,—and the Christian, remember, is God's soldier,—can learn his duty

thoroughly. He may learn to handle his arms in peace: but the coolness, the quickness, the watchfulness, the caution, the steady unbending courage, which distinguish the veteran from the recruit, are only to be gained on actual service. So it is only by actual service against God's enemies, it is only by passing through temptations and trials, that the Christian can be trained to his work. He needs to be taught the lesson of his own weakness. He needs to be taught to watch and guard against the surprises and stratagems of the foe. He needs to be perfected in faith and patience. How is all this to be done, if he is kept, like a plant under a glass, from every breath and touch of temptation? No: we shall assuredly be led into temptation, whether we pray against it or not; because there is no earthly road to heaven but has its own pitfalls, and its own snares. This is a sad but certain truth; and I should only deceive you were I to tell you otherwise.

If this however be so, if all must needs be tempted, what is the good, you may ask, of praying not to be led into temptation? The good is great and plain. For though God will not keep us away from all temptations, he will so order the matter, if we pray to him and trust in him, that the temptations shall lose half their danger. He will preserve us from being surprised by them: he will proportion them to our strength: he will enable us to withstand them. "In vain," (says the wise man, Prov. i. 17,) "is the net spread in the sight of any bird." Thus in vain will the snares of hell be set for us, if God opens our eyes to see them, and gives us wisdom to shun them. It is in this manner, if I mistake not, that God will answer our prayer to him, not to lead us into temptation. He will not take temptations altogether out of our way: but he will shew us how to escape them. He may perhaps now and then even lead us into temptations: but he will not leave us in the midst of

them. He will be with us to guide us through the peril. He will carry us safe through the fire and through the water, without suffering the fire to scorch us, or the water to come over our souls.

Here a consideration occurs which must never be overlooked,—namely, that temptations derive all their power of hurting us from our own weakness. If we were not so frail and blind, they would be no temptations to us. As the Psalmist says (lxxvii. 10), it is our own infirmity. Therefore, when God strengthens our infirmities, he does the same thing as weakening our temptations. If you had a weight to lift, which was a little above your strength, so long as the weight remained the same, and your strength too remained the same, you would be unable to lift it. But if half the weight were taken away, you could lift it then: so could you, if your strength were doubled. It is the same with all temptations. They are dangerous in proportion as they are too much for us. Therefore God is sometimes pleased to lessen the temptations: at other times, by a still greater mercy, he is pleased to increase our strength to bear them. Thus, when a thorn in the flesh was given to St. Paul, we read (2 Cor. xii. 8) that he "besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him." Now observe how this prayer was answered. His petition was not granted. But "the Lord said, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Observe too why the thorn was sent. St. Paul tells us: "to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure." Such is God's way of dealing with his servants. He takes the sting out of the temptation, and tempers down its poison, till he turns it into a medicine for their infirmities. It is thus that the various temptations into which, or rather through which, God leads his people—partly by the watchfulness they oblige us to, partly by the graces they exercise, and partly

by the powerful searching medicines which God's good skill knows how to extract from them—it is thus, I say, that even the temptations and trials of those who truly love and fear God, are so overruled and ordered by him, that even they work together for our good.

Moreover our Lord, by commanding us to pray against all temptations, has taught us both humility and caution. He has taught us humility, in commanding us to pray, not against some temptations, but against all. Nor does he say, Support us under temptations, but, Lead us not into temptation; as if the very approaching them were perilous. So that every temptation, however small, is dangerous to us, unless we are protected by God's Spirit. Surely this should teach us not to be high-minded, but to fear.

So likewise should it teach us caution, such caution as is enjoined in every part of Holy Writ. We are not to enter into the path of the wicked, but to turn from it and pass away. We are not to look upon the wine, when it sparkles in the cup. We are to flee youthful lusts. The author of the Book of Ecclesiasticus tells us (xxi. 2) to "flee from sin as from the face of a serpent: for, if thou comest too near, it will bite thee." In vain do we pray to God not to lead us into temptation, if we run into it of our own accord. Now let me ask you, brethren, are you duly careful in this matter? Are you careful to keep yourselves and your families out of the ways of sin? Are you on your guard against bad company? But what is bad company? Why, every company is bad to you, and every place is bad to you, if it occasions you to sin against God. Temptations, I said just now, draw their strength from our frailty. What may be no temptation to another man, may, from some weakness of character or disposition, be a crafty snare to me. Therefore it becomes me to avoid it. If you had a ditch to cross in the way to your work, and it was so broad that you could

not leap over it, after trying and tumbling in once or twice perhaps, you would go round by the bridge. It would be no reason to you that neighbour such a one could leap it. You would say, "He is welcome to leap it then: but I can only leap into it: I have tried twice already: twice have I wetted myself, and dirtied my clothes: so I will not run the risk again. The safe way over the bridge is good enough for me." In like manner, if by frequenting such a place, or such a company, you find that you have fallen once or twice into sin, listen not to the tempter when he bids you try again. Say within yourself: "I have tried too often already: I will run no further risk of hurting and dirtying my soul. Christ has cleansed it with his blood: it is too precious a thing to be polluted."

I have still to speak to you of the second petition which Christ has commanded us to offer up with regard to the future, the petition that God will deliver us from evil, or rather from the evil one: for so perhaps the word may be more closely translated. This petition is in fact the same which our Lord, on the night he was betrayed, offered up for his apostles; when he prayed to his Father, "not that he would take them out of the world, but that he would keep them from the evil,"—that is, from the evil one. (John xvii. 15.) Therefore our Catechism, in explaining this petition, teaches us to understand it as a prayer to God, that he will keep us from all sin and wickedness, and from our ghostly enemy, and from everlasting death. It is from our ghostly enemy, the devil, who is the author of all evil, and from all sin and wickedness, which are his works, and from everlasting death, which is the portion appointed for him and his, that we are to pray to our heavenly Father to deliver us.

Here it is worth while to remark the difference between the notion of evil which the Bible teaches, and the notion of evil which the world teaches. If you ask a man of the

world what evil is, he will tell you, everything that gives you pain, or annoys you, or makes you uncomfortable. Bad health, for instance, he will say is an evil; a lazy servant is an evil; a hard master, a quarrelsome neighbour, are evils: so is a damp house: poverty again is an evil; afflictions of all kinds are evils. If he troubled his head about state affairs, he would add such and such things in the government of the country, which he wished to see reformed or done away. In short, evil, according to the worldly man, is whatever troubles the body, or interferes with our worldly prosperity and comfort. But is this the Christian's notion of evil? Is this the answer which St. Paul or St. John would have given, if any one had asked them what evil is? They would tell you that the only evil of any consequence is what is against the will of God. So that the devil is above all the Evil One; because he is the great opposer of that goodness, which God wills and delights in. They would tell you further, that, in proportion as anything draws us nearer to God, it is good; in proportion as anything draws us away from God, it is evil. Sin therefore is the greatest evil which a Christian has to fight against, and to dread: because it is the chief hindrance which keeps us from God, the great partition-wall between us and him. Were there no such thing as sin in the world, we should be with God, as Adam was before the Fall. The pure in heart,—they who are free from inward, as well as from outward sin,—our Lord tells us, shall see God. Yes, even in this life they have a spiritual perception of him with the eyes and senses of their souls; the vapours of sin, which conceal him from us, being in their case nearly swept away. The thick cloud which hides God from the sinner, is to them little more than a misty veil, through which they are permitted to catch glimpses of his excellences, and to see him, though only through a glass, and darkly. But the

sinner has no such glimpses; for to him the glass is stained and blackened by the smoke and foulness of his sins. So that sin is doubly an evil. It is an evil, because it spreads a fog over the understanding, and hinders it from seeing God: and it is an evil, because it winds a chain round the heart, and fastens it down to the earth and the things of the earth, and hinders it from rising up to God.

Now which of these notions of evil is the truer? the Christian's, or the worldly man's? They are totally different. The one looks at the annoyances of the body, the other at the clogs of the soul. The one speaks of those things which make us ill at ease here on earth, the other of those things which keep us back from heaven. The man of the world looks to himself, and calls those things evil which are displeasing to himself: the Christian looks to God, and calls those things evil which are displeasing to God. Which of these two accounts is the truer? Which is the truer and the wiser way of judging of things? to measure them by reference to God? or to measure them by reference to ourselves? Moreover which have we most reason to be afraid of? a hurt to our bodies? or a hurt to our souls? Which hurt will sink the deepest? which will last the longest? Death, my good friends, the great and fatal hurter, Death, from the graves around us, has a voice to answer these questions. The inmates of those graves were once as much alive to all the pains and annoyances of the body and of the world, as we can be. They suffered as much in their days from sickness and afflictions of every kind. What are they the worse for it now? What does their dust feel now of all those pains and pinchings, which they deemed so sore and intolerable? No more than any of you feel of the sicknesses you went through when lying in your cradles. Do you remember any of those sicknesses? Can you feel the pain you felt when you were teething? Can you call

back the taste of any nauseous medicine which you may have taken when a year old? Then, but not else, may the corpses in the churchyard still feel the pains they went through when alive. Death ended all those pains. Death, in giving our bodies their last wound, frees them from all pain afterward. But the same death, which closes the pains of the body, opens and begins the sufferings of the soul—sufferings exceeding bitter, and hopeless, and without end. Is not this then the true evil? is not this the thing to be really dreaded? this second, this everlasting, everfeeling death. My brethren, in the same degree in which this second death, the death of the soul, is worse than the first death, the death of the body, in the very same degree must sin, the evil of the soul, be worse than any evil which can befall the body: for sin, it is written, brings forth death. These then, and not the annoyances which the worldly man makes so much of, are the evils which should rise up before our hearts and minds, when we pray to be delivered from evil. These are the evils against which the Church, in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer, lifts up her voice, crying to her Saviour and her God, "From sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, good Lord deliver us."

But it may be asked, and will be, I dare say, by some, "Is not bodily pain then an evil? and sickness? and poverty? and the loss of friends? are not all these evils?" Yes, undoubtedly, to us they are lesser evils: and, as such, we may pray against them. Our Lord himself prayed thrice that his cup of suffering might pass away from him. In this too we are permitted to follow his example: so long as we bear in mind that at the worst they are only lesser evils, and that in the end it is not unlikely they may prove to have been for our good. If any man ever suffered the sufferings of the body,—and those of the heart too, from false brethren,

from ungrateful disciples, from the slanders of his enemies, and the desertion of his friends—the apostle Paul suffered them. Yet how does he speak of them? "Our light affliction," (he says,) "which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This is the true way to think of earthly pains and sorrows,—that they are light beside the evils of the soul,—that they are only to last a moment, as it were, in comparison with eternity, above all, that they may be the means, if we bear them patiently, of raising us to a height of glory. I spoke a while ago of God's medicines. Now if God can extract health and strength for his people even from the poison of temptation, much more does he do so from the bitterness of affliction. Therefore let us never be impatient under the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when we are rebuked by him; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Now chastening for the present seemeth "grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby." (Heb. xii. 6, 11.) Grievous then as the chastening may be, if it yields the fruit of righteousness, if it works out a weight of glory for you, if it prepares and refines you for the happiness and the purity of heaven,—would you forego it? Of some it is written, that "through much tribulation they must enter into the kingdom of God." Would you give up the kingdom of God, the everlasting joys of heaven, rather than go through the tribulation, which by God's appointment is to lead you thither? Rather glory in your tribulation, remembering that "tribulation worketh patience."

Seeing therefore that worldly afflictions are grievous so long as they last, we may indeed pray against them. But such a prayer must be offered up with a full sense of their comparative insignificance, lest we be troubled by them

above measure. It must be offered up moreover in humble reliance on the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, lest peradventure we should be praying against a blessing. In a word, we must pray against them with an *if*. But our sins need no *if* in praying against them. Their danger, their burthen, their grievousness, their shame, their curse, we know too well from sad experience. God himself has declared them to be evil. Therefore they should be the evils uppermost in our minds, when we say, "Deliver us from evil."

I have now explained the last petition in the third part of the Lord's Prayer: and with this the short form of it, which we find in St. Luke, ends. St. Matthew gives a longer form, which we are accustomed to make use of, and adds a fourth part by way of conclusion: "for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever." The meaning of this conclusion it will not take many words to shew. It contains our reasons for praying to God: because the kingdom is his,—he is the king and ruler of all the world; the power is his,—so he can grant our requests; and the glory of our deliverance is and will be his. By our salvation he is and will be glorified: and our duty is to seek not our own glory, but his, which endureth for ever and ever. Herewith the prayer ends, by leaving the image of eternity before us.

Thus have I endeavoured to show you as much as I can of the meaning of this wonderful prayer. What love to God, what desires of holiness, what a disregard of earthly things, what longings for heavenly things, have we found in it! And why, suppose you, did our Lord teach us a prayer so full of all these blessed feelings? Was it not that, by our saying it over day after day, the excellence of such feelings might be kept ever before our minds, and the love of them might be wrought into our hearts? This is the true pur-

pose of the Lord's Prayer: if it do not this in some degree, it does nothing. Therefore I say not to you, repeat the Lord's Prayer, but practise the Lord's Prayer: make its petitions the rule and model of your lives: and may God prosper your endeavours to practise it, to the health and comfort of your souls.

XL.

IDOLATRY.

1 JOHN v. 21.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

"THY commandment is exceeding broad," says the Psalmist, speaking of God's holy law. It is well to bear these words in mind, whenever we are reading any part of that law, above all when we are looking at the Ten Commandments, as they are called, which God gave to the children of Israel, after he had brought them out of Egypt. Nothing can be of greater importance than to have a right understanding on this matter; and a right understanding must be a full one. It will not do to know a quarter of the meaning of God's commandments, or half their meaning: you must know their whole meaning: else you will never wish to try to keep them wholly, as it behoves every Christian to do. Now when we remember that God's commandment is exceeding broad, we are warned that there is a great deal in it, and are led to look for more than may at first sight meet the eye. If a man were to hear that a friend had left him an estate, and went to the spot, and saw a narrow strip of land, he might at first think he had seen the whole of it. But if he was told the estate was very large, he would feel sure that there must be something more: he would say

to himself, "This little strip of land can never be the large estate which my friend has left me;" and he would set about inquiring diligently how far the estate reached. So should it be with God's commandments. At first thought, when a man hears that the sixth commandment is, "Thou shalt not murder," the seventh, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," the eighth, "Thou shalt not steal," he may fancy that nothing more is forbidden by these words, than just the very crimes mentioned in them, of murder, and adultery, and theft. But when he calls to mind that God's commandments are exceeding broad, if he has any power of thinking in his mind, and really wishes to please God, he will begin to say to himself, "There must be something more in these commandments than I thought for; or the Psalmist would never have called them exceeding broad. If murder only means what is commonly called murder, and nothing more, there is nothing broad in that. If adultery only means what is commonly called adultery, and nothing more, there is nothing broad in that. If stealing only means what is commonly called stealing, and nothing more, there is nothing very broad in that. These commandments must have some wider and deeper meaning. What can that meaning be?" Thus the man's curiosity is set to work: he begins to study and to search; and perhaps after a time, in our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, he finds out the exceeding breadth and depth and height of God's law. For this is the way we ought to study God's commandments, not in a spirit of bondage, or of dutiful unwillingness, but in the spirit of true children, with hearts full of reverence and love. God's commandments are not grievous, but just, and wise, and merciful, and good and wholesome for us. So that it behoves us not to listen to them with slow hearts, nor to look at them with half-closed eyes, like people who are afraid of seeing too much of a thing. We should gaze at

them with eyes wide open, and search into them on every side, that we may be sure of not overlooking or missing any part of any one of them. None but rogues and felons look at a law to find out how they may evade it. Would it not then be a shame and a sin to look at God's law, as rogues and felons look at human laws? Rather should we look at it in the spirit of sons,—since sons we are called to be,—with a wish to make as much of it as possible, that, seeing its full reach, we may strive to keep it to the utmost.

This, for example, is the way we ought to look at the first and second commandments, which are so nearly connected, that they may well be considered as branches of one and the same law. The first forbids us to have any god, but the one true God. The second forbids us to make any image or likeness of any created thing, for the purpose of bowing down to it and worshipping it. These two commandments, I say, may be regarded in a manner as parts of one and the same commandment. For there is hardly any way in which mankind have been drawn off from the worship of the one true God to the worship of false gods, so much as by the setting up of images, and the falling down to them and worshipping them. Thus we read in the Book of Wisdom (xiv. 12), "the devising of idols was the beginning of spiritual fornication, and the invention of them the corruption of life." Strange as it may seem to us that reasonable beings should bow down to images of wood and stone, the work of their own hands, and should worship these images as gods, yet, at the time when our Lord came into the world, this idolatry or idol-worship was spread over the whole earth. Every nation, except the Jews, was sunk in idol-worship. The world was full of idols, and therewith of false gods: so that almost everything was worshipped in it, except the one true God, the only Maker of heaven and earth. He, and he alone, was lost and forgotten amid the

mob of deities that were thus swarming in every quart
the world. The yoke of idolatry lay heavy upon
people and nation and language: nor was that yoke br
until our Saviour sent forth the preachers of his Gosp
bring all mankind to the knowledge of the one true
and of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

After our Saviour's teaching, one might have tho
things would have gone on better, at least in his own Ch
But, alas! the same causes will ever produce the
effects. Instead of the images of heathen gods, which
been overthrown, the churches after a time were a
filled with the images of apostles, evangelists, martyrs,
other holy men. No one can believe that, when t
images of saints were first introduced, it was done with
design of worshipping them. Had any one told the
sons who first set them up, that such would be the co
quence, doubtless they would have exclaimed, "It is im
sible. What! Christians, the disciples of Jesus Christ,
idolaters again! Christians worship any one but God
his Christ! It can never be. We are only setting up t
images of holy men, to keep alive the memory of their
piety in the minds of the common people. But as to
shipping them . . that will never come to pass."
would doubtless have been the language of these
meaning but mistaken persons, who first introduced im
into christian churches, if they had been told that the
would come when these images would be reverenced,
the saints themselves would be worshipped, more than
They would certainly have said, "It can never happ
Yet happen it did: and if it had not pleased God to b
our bonds, as he did at the time of the Reformation,—
had not pleased him to pour out his Spirit upon this
and to raise up holy men amongst us, men full of zeal
piety, champions of God and his Christ, who with

mighty weapon, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, smote the outward and visible idolatry of the land, so that image and saint fell to the ground before them, just as Dagon of old in the Philistine temple fell before the ark of the Lord,—had it not been for this great deliverance, we too should this day have been in the same darkness, in which so many other people are still lying: we should still have been praying to saints, and bowing down to their images.

Here are two great and merciful deliverances vouchsafed by Almighty God to this land. The first deliverance was from the gross darkness of heathen ignorance; the second, from the twilight of Romish superstition. The first was a deliverance from the worshipping of idol gods; the second, from the worshipping of idol saints. Such great things has God done for this land, more than for most others. Ought not our thankfulness then to be in some degree answerable to his goodness? ought we not to love and serve him better than they to whom he has been less bountiful? Above all, must we not be utterly without excuse, if, after all that God has done to clear the land from idolatry, we are wicked enough to make fresh idols for ourselves? The poor heathen has an excuse to offer for worshipping his gods of stone; he has been taught to do so by his parents. The papist has an excuse to offer for reverencing the images of his saints: he has been misled by his priests, and has never had the Scriptures opened to him. But what excuse can we bring forward? we who have never seen an idol or an image,—we who are Protestants, and the children of Protestants,—we who have the Bible in our hand to teach us better,—what excuse can any of us plead before our heavenly Judge, if we break his first commandment, and do dishonour to his name, by choosing some other god to worship? Besides, the idols of the heathens are their only

gods: but we, in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are blessed with the knowledge of a God, great and perfect enough to engage all our thoughts, merciful and loving enough to attract all our affections. Were our hearts large as the universe, God is great enough to fill them.

But perhaps you may think that no Englishman of the present day is ever guilty of the dreadful sin of idolatry. No Englishman, you will tell me, for the last hundred years, has ever thought of worshipping images or idols. Therefore the first and second commandments no way concern us, except as reason for giving thanks to God, who has made us so much better than the rest of the world. This is a very natural thought; and I doubt not many think so. Very many, I doubt not, when they hear the first two commandments read on a Sunday morning, instead of heartily praying to God to have mercy on them for their breaches of this law,—instead of beseeching him to incline their hearts to keep it better for the future,—are readier to say, like the Pharisee in the parable, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, idolaters, worshippers of graven images, breakers of the first and second commandments." But though it may be natural to think it an impossible thing for an Englishman of the present day to be an idolater, is it right to think so? Does a man who thinks so, think rightly? Is idolatry, the breach of the first commandment, is the having other gods beside the one true God, a sin unknown in England at this day? is it a sin which we can truly say that none of us have ever been guilty of? It is true, there are no idolaters in England, who are outwardly and visibly such: there are none who worship graven images, and put what the prophet Ezekiel calls (xiv. 3) the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face. But are there none who are idolaters inwardly and spiritually? Are there none who have set up their idols in their hearts? For

observe, there are two things that the prophet Ezekiel joins together in the passage just referred to: and against both of them he threatens heavy judgments. There is the putting the stumblingblock of our iniquity before our face; and there is also the setting up of idols in our hearts. The first of these two things is that outward and visible idolatry, which the heathens are guilty of, and from which this land through God's grace is altogether free. But the other kind of idolatry, the setting up of idols in the heart, is much the worse of the two; at least if it be in a heart which has been called to the love of Christ; if, instead of keeping our souls pure, as befits temples of the Holy Ghost, we profane and pollute them by devoting them to vain and perishable, or as too many do, to abominable things. "If any man defile the temple of God," says the apostle, "him will God destroy." (1 Cor. iii. 17.) But the heart of a Christian is the temple of God: it is the sanctuary which, far above any building made with hands, God delights to take up his abode in. Shall any one then dare to defile God's own temple, by setting up an idol therein, to provoke him to jealousy, and as it were, insult him to his face? Just consider what your feelings would be, were a heathen king to conquer this land, and to set up the images of his gods in the beautiful cathedral at Salisbury, where we and our fathers for so many generations have been accustomed to worship God and his Son. Yet the heart of a Christian is far more beautiful, and far more precious, and far dearer to God, than that cathedral. The cathedral at Salisbury will not last for ever: Christ did not die for it: he did not purchase it with his own blood. But us he has bought: for us he has paid a price, that we might be his for all eternity. What then must be his feelings, to see his own hearts defiled and polluted by being given up to idols.

For, as I have already hinted, there are divers ways of

breaking the first and second commandments, beside worshipping Baal, as wicked Ahab did, and bowing down to stocks and stones. Many a man has set up his idols in his heart, who never dreamt of worshipping a graven image. The root and essence of idolatry, as St. Paul teaches us, is the worshipping and serving God's creatures more than God himself. Whoever then serves any one of God's creatures more than he serves God,—whoever loves any one of God's creatures more than he loves God,—whoever makes any one of God's creatures more an object of his thoughts, and allows it to fill a greater space in his mind than God fills,—that man is guilty of idolatry, in the spiritual and christian sense of the word. When I say God's creatures, I mean, not living creatures merely, but creatures of every kind,—everything which God has made for us, or enabled us to make for ourselves,—all the sweet and relishing things we can enjoy in this world,—pleasures, honours, riches, comforts of every kind. Therefore if any man is foolish and wicked enough to give up his heart to any one of these creatures, and suffers himself to be drawn away from serving God by it, he is an idolater in the sight of heaven.

But if this be so, the question, Are there any idolaters in England? is answered already. Looking at the first two commandments in their fullness, and understanding them according to their exceeding breadth, who is there who has not transgressed them at some time of his life? Who is there, except only the sincere and pious Christian, who is not breaking them daily? Well might St. John warn us, as he does in the text, to keep ourselves from idols, and make this the concluding precept in his letter. For if the goods of this world may all become so many idols, luring our hearts away from God, then is the land full of idols of a thousand kinds,—idols for all ages, for all classes, for all tempers, for all hearts. There are idols for the worldly-

minded, and idols for the generous,—idols for the intemperate, and idols for the prudent: there are idols for the affectionate; and again there is an idol for the selfish. Young and old have their idols; married and unmarried have their idols; rich and poor have their idols. From these idols keep yourselves, my brethren: and whenever you hear the first and second commandments read, pray to God more heartily than you have yet done, to forgive you your breaches of these two laws, and to incline your hearts to keep them for the future.

But it may be well to go a little into particulars. The covetous man, then, to begin with him, is an idolater. Of this there can be no doubt; for St. Paul expressly tells us, in his Epistle to the Colossians (iii. 5), that covetousness, or, as the word may perhaps be more closely rendered, insatiableness and greediness, is idolatry; and again, in the Epistle to the Ephesians (v. 5), the covetous man,—that is, the insatiable and greedy man, the man whom there is no satisfying, is said to be an idolater. It matters little what the man is greedy of,—whether he is greedy of money, or whether he is greedy of business, or whether he is greedy of land, or whether he is greedy of meat and drink, or whether he is greedy of praise and honour and distinction,—if a man is greedy of any earthly thing, and does not know when he has had enough, and is ever longing and craving after it, and wishing to add more to more, the sentence is express against that man: St. Paul has declared him to be an idolater. The reason is plain. The covetous and greedy man has given that place in his heart to earthly things, which ought to be kept for heavenly things. Instead of considering the things of this world as mere necessaries, and setting the prime of his affections on things above, he looks on the former as the real good; whereas our Saviour has told us that there is none really good but one, that is,

God. Perhaps however a man may say, What does it signify whether we look on the things of this life as necessaries and conveniences, or whether we deem them to be really goods? I answer, it signifies very much: for when we want anything, food, raiment, furniture, house, lands, simply because such things are necessary and convenient to us, it is easy to see there must be a limit to our want somewhere. Take food, for instance. If a man eats simply because it is necessary to eat in order to support life, if he drinks only to satisfy his thirst, it is clear he will soon be satisfied. He will soon have eaten and drunk enough; and he will know when he has had enough, and will not wish for more. He will eat and drink to get rid of his hunger and thirst, just as he washes his face and hands to refresh himself and get rid of the dirt. No man, after his hands have been washed quite clean, goes on rubbing and scrubbing them over and over again: yet many a greedy man will go on eating and drinking after he has had his fill. Why so? Because greedy men, the glutton and the drunkard, take delight in eating and drinking, and do not take a delight in washing. They wash, like rational beings, because it is necessary and wholesome and seemly; and so they wash enough, and no more. They eat and drink, not because it is necessary, but because they think it a good thing: they take a pleasure in it, and love it; and so they eat and drink to excess. For to that which is good, there is no limit in the heart of man: of that we can never have enough. Here then is the great difference between seeking a thing, because it is necessary or useful to us, and desiring it as a real good. In the one case there is a limit to our wishes, in the other none. In the one case we have enough, when our needs are satisfied; in the other case we never have enough. We always wish and crave and pant and hunger after more: and such craving and hungering is idolatrous. It is mistaking the crea-

ture for the Creator, and misapplying to a poor, unworthy, mean, and perishable thing, those infinite yearnings of the heart which belong of right to the Maker and Ruler of the universe. He, and he alone is infinite: therefore he alone is worthy of being loved and sought for with all our boundless longings and desires. To set up any worldly thing as the end and object of those longings, is to throw away on what is bounded and perishable, the worship due to what is infinite and eternal. Therefore it is as plainly and certainly idolatry, as if we bowed the knee to Chemosh or to Ashtaroth. I say, the worship: because longing is worship, desire is worship, the best of all worship, the worship of the heart. He then who gives his heart to any creature, worships it, yea, and sacrifices to it the best member that he has. If this be not arrant idolatry, I know not what is. I have mentioned the greedy desire of meat and drink, partly because everybody must know what that means, and partly because St. Paul, in telling us of people whose belly is their god, has brought the instance home to our present purpose. But what is true of greediness of food, is equally true of every other kind of greediness. All insatiable longing after earthly things, all grasping and restless striving, is a part of that covetousness which is idolatry. The covetous man defiles and pollutes his heart, which is the temple of the Holy Ghost, as the Jews defiled and polluted the temple at Jerusalem, by setting up the tables of the money-changers in it, and filling it with buying and selling. Thus does the covetous man fill the temple of his heart with busy thoughts of money-getting and buying and selling. He sets up the abomination of gain in what ought to be the sanctuary of the Most High. But if the covetous man be an idolater, what does he worship? Our Saviour tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, where, in warning his disciples not to give up their hearts to taking thought about worldly

and perishable things, he uses those remarkable words, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." The covetous man then serves Mammon. He has taken Mammon for his guide and for his god: and so he directly breaks the first commandment, which forbids us to have any god except the God of heaven.

But Mammon is not the only heathen god whose worship is carried on in the hearts of Englishmen, calling themselves Christians, and Protestants too, at this day. What shall we say of Belial, the fleshliest spirit that ever seduced man to sin? He is the god of lust, of riot, of uncleanness, of unruliness. The impure, fornicators and adulterers, lovers of misrule of every kind, are called in Scripture sons of Belial, and children of Belial; just as the pious and upright are called sons of God, and children of God. Can we say then that there are no children of Belial, no worshippers of Belial now in England? The reports of our courts of law prove that there are thousands and thousands; and I am afraid that those who are brought before a court of law, are not one in a hundred. Yet every such worshipper of Belial is plainly guilty of idolatry, and is living in the open breach of the first and great commandment.

Or look at Moloch, the god of hatred and of every fierce passion: has he no children, no worshippers in the land? men who pay him the service he is best pleased with,—the service of an envious, rancorous, malicious, and festered heart. As every lustful thought and impure desire is an act of worship to Belial,—as every greedy thought and covetous desire is an act of worship to Mammon,—so every spiteful and revengeful thought, every feeling of ill-will, every desire to do any one an injury, everything like pleasure at our neighbour's hurt,—all these are acts of worship and heart-service to the hateful and cruel Moloch. Is Moloch then without worshippers in England, or in any part of England,

at this day? Are there none who serve him? none who serve him faithfully, and zealously, and constantly?

Would, my brethren, we were as faithful and zealous and constant in the service of the most high God, as too many are,—as all perhaps have been at some time or other,—in the service of one or other of these idols! Would that we only gave the Lord of heaven and earth as much as the worshippers of Moloch and Belial and Mammon readily give to them! Then should we give God everything that he requires. We should give him our hearts, we should give him our thoughts, we should give him our time, we should give him our labour and diligence. With all these do we serve the idols which dare to rival the God of heaven, the idol of hate, the idol of lust, the idol of covetousness. These gods, these devils rather, have no scant share of service paid to them. For them their votaries are eager to work. To gratify his revenge, to gratify his unlawful passions, to heap up fresh piles of riches, a man will plan, and toil, and risk money, if need be, and will even deny himself in many things. Who does as much for God? Who toils as much in God's service, and spends as much thought on it, and makes as many sacrifices for it, as the servants of sin will often to pamper their sins? Alas! all the while they are only fattening themselves for the altar of wrath, and gathering the fuel that is to consume them.

But though I have spoken to you of so many idols, I have still to mention the commonest of all, the idol which has the most, the most constant, the devoutest worshippers; which reigns indeed in every heart, unless it has been cast out by the Spirit of God. This idol, my brethren, is Self. Self is the great idol of all. He is your idol and mine, and was the idol of our fathers before us, and will be the idol of your children after you, when you are sleeping in your graves. Therefore is our Saviour so urgent on us in many places to

deny ourselves: because he knows that the traitor, Self, has surprised our hearts, and fortified himself within them, as in a stronghold; so that it is almost impossible to get rid of him, unless we starve him out. So long as we feed him and strengthen him by gratifying his wilfulness and whims, so long will he continue in possession. Nor will even starving him out be enough of itself, unless we add frequent prayer thereto. For this is the spirit of which our Lord said, that it goeth not out, except by prayer and fasting. Mortify yourselves therefore, brethren: strive to crush every feeling within you, that would lift up its head against the will of God: strive to break the neck of your own will, and to make it bend meekly and patiently under the yoke of Christ. Above all, pray heartily and frequently to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that he will come and set up his own image in your heart, and sprinkle it with his purifying blood, and hallow it with his sanctifying Spirit.



XLI.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH COMMANDMENTS.

ACTS x. 5.

What God has cleansed, that call not thou common.

I HAVE chosen this text for the sake of saying a few words to you about the third and fourth commandments, which have this point of agreement, that they both enjoin us to reverence and hallow things appertaining to God. The third commandment teaches us to hallow God's holy name, and not to profane it: the fourth commandment teaches us to hallow God's holy day, and not to profane it. The reason for both is the same, namely, that the things which God has hallowed by uniting them to himself, we are to reckon holy. Be it the day which the Lord hath made, or be it the name which the Lord hath chosen, in each case it is the Lord's. He has been pleased to set it apart for himself: he has made it sacred and cleansed it: therefore we are not to call it common; that is, we are not to make use of it for common purposes; we are not to treat it lightly and as a common thing. We are to set a distinction and a difference between the Lord's name and other words, between the Lord's day and other days.

But if we are to reverence God's name, and not to profane it, because it is the name of God Most High,—if we

are to keep the sabbath-day holy, and not to profane it, because it is the day which the Lord has hallowed,—we may be sure the principle does not stop here. Everything else which God has in any way set apart for his own, and put his mark on,—everything else which in any way belongs more peculiarly to him,—his word, his ordinances, his house, his people,—all these, you will see after a moment's thought, come under the same rule. They are all things which God has cleansed; therefore we must not call them common. He has set them apart for his own service: he has fenced them off, as it were, from the waste of the world, and has enclosed them for his own use. Hence there is the same sort of difference between them and all merely worldly and common things, as there is between a garden and Salisbury Plain. No one who knows how to behave himself, would bring a horse into a garden, or walk over the strawberry beds, or trample down the flowers. But in riding from here to Salisbury everybody would feel himself at liberty, while crossing the downs, to gallop over the turf at pleasure. Well! the same difference which there is between common down and a cultivated garden, the same is there also between worldly days, worldly books, worldly names, worldly people, and God's day, God's book, God's name, and God's people. The former are common, and may be treated as such: the latter are not common; because God has taken them to himself, and brought them within the limits of his sanctuary, and thrown the safeguard of his holiness around them. In a word, they belong to God, and therefore are not to be treated as if they belonged to man.

It is true, that in one sense everything belongs to God. For everything was made by him: the whole earth is the Lord's, and all that is therein. In this view of the matter every day may be called the Lord's day, as well as Sunday: so too may every man living be called his, as well as the



holiest of the apostles. All in this sense are his; that is, we are all his property and his subjects; because he is the Maker and the Ruler of everything in heaven and earth. Therefore those who are heartily desirous of doing right, and of giving God his own as far as may be, would never think of unhallowing or profaning any one act or moment of their lives. They would never think of keeping back any part of their time, or of their thoughts, from God's service; because they know that he has a right to every part of them, and that they ought to be wholly and altogether his. It is in this spirit that the apostle bids us pray *always*. He does not say, Pray when you get up, or, when you go to bed, or, when you go to church, but always. In like manner he enjoins us to seek God's glory in the smallest things, as well as in the greatest. "Whether ye eat or drink," (he says,) "or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." But though all this be so, it by no means follows that some things may not belong to God more nearly and peculiarly than others. Monday for example belongs to God as well as Sunday: but it does not belong to him as much and as exclusively; for the best of reasons,—because he has not been pleased to make it so. He is by right the master and owner of every day in the week equally: but he has been pleased to leave the six days open and unenclosed for the common business of life,—for ploughing and sowing, and reaping, and harvesting, and buying and selling; while the seventh day he has thought fit to reserve for himself, and has set it apart to be employed in his worship. Thus it comes to pass that, though all the seven days are equally his by right, yet Sunday by his appointment is more entirely and peculiarly his day than the other six. What is true of Sundays and working-days, is equally true of prayer. Though we are enjoined to be always praying in a manner,—that is, we are to keep a sense of God's power and goodness always alive in our

minds, and are to look up to him for help in whatever we take in hand,—yet we are not to be always offering up prayers on our knees. The good Christian will live in such a way, that his whole life will be one continual prayer; yet on the other hand he will not think that he is thereby excused from having fixed times for regular prayer. He will pray by himself: he will pray with his family: he will pray with his fellow-Christians in the house of God. On these occasions the feelings of devotion, which are always alive and burning in his heart, will blaze up into a flame, and will find vent in words: the silent, quiet, habitual piety of every day and every hour will be heightened for a time into open adoration, in which the whole man will be given up to prayer; and lips and thoughts, heart and mind, will join to entreat a blessing from the Lord, and to magnify the God of his salvation.

In a word, no day, no action, no thought, no moment of our lives ought to be separate from God: some days, however, some actions, some things and persons, are his more entirely and more directly than others; and these we should reverence and hallow above the rest. Such appears to be the general spirit of the third and fourth commandments. But it will be useful to take a nearer view of them, and to see what each of them more particularly enjoins and forbids.

We will begin with the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Now what is taking the name of the Lord in vain? That is the first thing to be made out: and then the sense of the commandment will be clear. To take the name of the Lord in vain, is to take it into our mouths or use it in any light or trifling or unworthy manner. This may be done in two ways; either by calling God to witness to a lie,—for lies and falsehoods of all kinds are in many places of Scripture called

vanity; or else it may be done by using that holy name on small and irreverent occasions; for light and empty things are also called vanity. Whoever then calls God to witness falsely, takes his name in vain: and whoever uses God's name lightly and irreverently, takes it in vain. What I have said of God's name will of course apply equally to Jesus Christ; for he is God. Indeed it applies to every holy and sacred word or name. So that all false swearing, and all idle swearing of every sort, is forbidden by this commandment.

Of the wickedness, the utter madness of swearing falsely, and calling the God of truth to witness to a lie, I shall say nothing to you. False swearing has never been the vice of Englishmen: and they who wish for a sermon about it, may read one in the marketplace at Devizes. The shocking story there recorded, of the wretched woman who forswore herself, and fell down dead, is proof enough that our God is neither blind nor deaf, and that he will not suffer himself to be mocked, or his name to be invoked falsely. True, he does not always strike at the instant, as he did then: but woe to that head over which the blow of God's wrath keeps hanging, only to fall on it in the next world with a weight of punishment insupportable!

Though false swearing, however, I would fain hope, is not a common vice among Englishmen, idle and profane swearing is so, and that to a very great and strange degree. I call it a strange degree; because it surely is strange that a sin, to which the temptations are so trifling, a sin which yields neither profit nor pleasure, should meet one at every step in a christian land. Go into the streets of any town, go to any place where a number of persons have got together; and whether they are working, or whether they are playing, whether they are angry, or whether they are merry, you can hardly pass by a knot of half-a-dozen Englishmen, let them

be doing what they may, without having your ears wounded by some vain and wicked oath or curse. But why do I say a knot of Englishmen? when you all know that a man does not need company to swear in. Wherever there is a mouth to swear with, you are but too likely to hear swearing. A man will swear at a horse, at a dog, at a bat, at a spade: for everything, and for nothing, many an Englishman will swear. Now is not this strange? May I not call it strange? Does it not seem strange to you, my brethren, in your cooler moments, that among Christians,—among a people who know that God himself has forbidden them to swear,—among a people who call themselves Christians, and would be very angry if I told them they were not Christians,—is it not passing strange that among such a people,—who have been taught by Christ and his apostles to pray always, and to swear never,—there should be so little praying and so much swearing? Truly an Indian, on first coming amongst us, might be led to fancy us the godliest people in the the world, from hearing the sacred names of God and Christ at every corner of every street. He might say to himself, "What a holy, what a pious people this must be! Every third man I fall in with is praying." But when he had been a while longer in the country, and had grown better used to our customs, and had found out that this praying, as he fancied it,—this invoking and uttering and repeating of the most sacred names on every occasion,—was all swearing, what would he think of us then? Would he not begin to think us most daringly impious and profane? profane, for using the most sacred words in such a light and careless manner: daringly impious, for calling the all-powerful Ruler of the universe to look down from his throne above the heavens, to witness—what? a petty dispute . . a trifling accident . . a jest. Truly these are things well worthy the notice of the King of heaven, that we should call on him by



name to look down from his throne of glory and behold them.

I am well aware, that many a man has gone on swearing year after year, without ever thinking seriously about the matter. He may have fallen into the habit when he was very young: perhaps he may have caught it from his father: or he may have learnt it at school, or when at work with other lads older and wickeder than himself: hearing them swear, he may have thought it a fine manly thing to do so too: and thus in course of time the trick of swearing may have grown upon him, until he hardly knows when he is guilty of it. But whether we know it, or whether we know it not, whether we do it thinkingly or thoughtlessly, a sin it is most assuredly and most clearly: for it is a plain breach of one of God's commandments. Nor do I know, when a man is called to account for this his sin at the bar of God's judgment-seat, that he will much mend the matter by pleading, that he had been guilty of it so often, at last it became a second nature to him, and he got to swear ever and anon without so much as intending it. For God perhaps may ask him in return, "How camest thou by that nature?" What will the swearer answer to such a question? He cannot say, that God gave him this nature. He cannot say, that his tongue was made to curse and swear, rather than to bless and pray. He cannot even say, that he did not know better. For every one knows that swearing is wrong. What answer then can the swearer make to God's just and searching question, "How camest thou by that nature?" He must remain speechless, like the man who came to the marriage-feast without having on a wedding garment. You all know the sentence which was pronounced against him: "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness."

But though every man must know swearing to be wrong, many, I would fain hope, can never have thought of it as

an open breach of God's commandments: many, I would fain hope, if they did so think, would not be guilty of it. They swear, as I said just now, from habit: and unluckily no habit is formed more easily, none, when formed, is harder to break. Therefore let me beg those, who have not yet fallen into this most foolish and sinful habit,—let me entreat all those, whose consciences are not yet so hardened and blunted, that they can take the names of their God and Saviour into their mouths without knowing it,—let me beg and entreat all such persons to beware how they entangle themselves in a besetting sin, from which, if they once fall into it, they may never be able to get free again. You are still safe, I would say to all such, if you will only keep so. Your hearts are still soft: why harden them? Why run with your eyes open into the devil's snare? Why find a pleasure, against nature and against grace, in learning to break one of God's commandments, and to take his holy name in vain? Let me entreat all parents too, who value the salvation of their children, to check the first beginnings of this evil practice in them. Stop them at the first profane word. Shew them how foolish, how unmeaning, how sinful it is. Should they fancy it manly, teach them what true manliness is,—that there is no manliness in doing wrong, but in doing right,—that the true manly part is not to follow others in their evil ways, but to act up to what we know to be our duty, not suffering ourselves to be blown out of the straight path by the gust of evil example, but keeping our footing and our course right onward, as we may do in spite of all the evil example in the world, if we will only pray to God for his help. In his might we may all be made strong enough to stand the buffet of a real temptation, much more to keep our ground against a sin, which we can neither plead any inclination to, nor excuse by any natural infirmity,—a sin therefore easily checked, if we are only watchful to stop it at the outset.

To those who have already formed the habit of swearing, to those who are already in the snare, and feel the weight of evil custom clinging to their tongue,—what shall I say to them? I will say to them, Your sin, I would hope, began in carelessness: try if you cannot cure it by becoming watchful. In all your prayers make it a special petition that the Lord will put a watch before your mouth, and will keep the door of your lips. I do not say that even by this means a deeply-rooted habit can be weeded out in a few weeks. Look at a field which has been long neglected. You all know how very difficult it is to get it clean. It is not a single ploughing, nor a single turnip-crop, nor a single hoeing, that will do. Yet there is not a field in all England which has been neglected half so much as the soul of the habitual swearer. It must needs take time therefore to root the habit out of him; and nothing but care and time with God's blessing will do it. But if a man prays against the habit, his conscience after a time will be awakened: he will no longer take God's name in vain without thinking of it. By degrees he will get to check the rising oath: and at last his tongue will unlearn its swearing, and be ready only for blessing and for prayer. Happy, happy man in that case! yea, happy, as he now is miserable! He will have gained the greatest of all victories, a victory over himself. He will have broken through the snare in which the Evil One held him, and will have gained a deliverance from the most fearful peril. Instead of the language of devils, he will have learnt the language of angels, and even in this world will speak the words of heaven.

As the third commandment commands us to hallow God's holy name, so does the fourth command us to hallow his holy day. How? By abstaining from all manner of work. "Six days shall ye labour, and do all that ye have

to do: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God: in it ye shall do no manner of work." The curse of labour, under which man was to earn and eat his bread, was taken off for one day in seven for all ranks and classes of mankind, the poor as well as the rich, nay even for the beasts of the field, which man employs in his service. Think a little what a blessing this is to the poor, that God by express command has kept one day out of every seven for them, on which they are to rest from their toil,—a day on which their masters have no claim on their services, and are bound to require nothing from them, beyond what is absolutely needful. This, I say, is a very great blessing to the poor; and loving the poor, as my master Christ has taught me to do, most heartily do I thank God for it. For wherever Sunday is kept as it should be, there the poor cannot be entirely ground down: they cannot be made slaves of, as they have been in so many heathen countries. They have one day in seven which they can call their own,—a day on which the distinction between master and servant is, comparatively speaking, laid aside, and we all meet together in the house of God as brethren and as fellow-Christians. This great blessing and privilege the poor owe to God and to his religion.

But God does not bestow his blessings on the poor alone, though it not seldom happens that the poor come in for the largest share of them. The blessed rest of God's holy day is appointed not only for the poor, but also for the rich, if they will only let it be so. It is a day for the poor to rest from the work of their hands: it is a day for the rich to rest from the work of their heads, from the anxieties of worldly thoughts, from the troubles and cares of business. Only too many of them will not enter into this rest. They have been walking so long through the rough places of the earth, that, when they come home, the mud is sticking to their



shoes, and the burs and brambles to their clothes; and they have grown so used to them that they feel quite uncomfortable if they are taken off. So besotted are many persons with the love of the world, that, instead of flinging all its cares away from them, in order that they may enjoy the blessed rest of the Sunday, they set apart their Sunday for looking over and casting up their accounts. Though they cannot blow or stir the fire in Mammon's furnace, they are determined at all events to snuff in its smoke.

God, my brethren, has called us away altogether from the service of Mammon on the Sunday. On this day, he has said, ye shall be wholly mine: Mammon shall have no part in you. But when he called us away from the service of Mammon, it was not that we should pass from it to the service of Belial, or to the service of Moloch. We are to rest on the sabbath-day from all manner of work, not merely from all work in the service of Mammon, but also from all work in the service of Belial, and in the service of Moloch. Yet how many spend the rest of the holy sabbath in drinking and gaming, and all manner of revelling, the natural end of which is quarrels and brawls! How many, after coming to church in the morning, go and pass their evening at the alehouse, thus shewing that the worship they have been pretending to offer up to God, has been nothing but a shameful mockery! How many squander the chief part of the day at the alehouse, without coming to church at all! Sooth to say, I verily believe, there is more drunkenness, more swearing, more rioting, more licentiousness of all kinds in England on a Sunday, than on any other day of the week.

Now how does all this come to pass? In other words, what is the reason that in this christian land Sunday, instead of being kept holier than other days, should by so many persons be kept as the most unholy day of all the seven? The reason is, that, whereas God ordained Sunday to be a

day of rest, the world has turned it into a day of idleness: and idleness is ever the fruitful mother of vices. Sunday, however, is not meant to be a day of idleness. It is a day of rest from the labours of the world, in order that it may be a day holy to God, that it may be given up altogether to his service, that it may be employed in learning his will, in praying to him, and in praising him.

And here I would remind you how all God's commandments hang together; how they are knit and woven together like a fine web, wherein you cannot loosen a single stitch, without danger of unravelling the whole. We know from St. James (ii. 10), that "whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." This he is, even if he were to keep all the rest of the law. But can any one do this? Can any one be sure that, while he breaks the law in one point, he shall be able to keep all the rest of it? So far from this, that, if a man lives in the breach of any one of God's commandments, if he allows himself to indulge in any one sin, none can tell where he will stop. There is no letting any one devil into our souls without the risk of his going and fetching seven other devils wickeder than himself: and the purer the house may hitherto have been, the more eager will they be to come and lodge in it. Thus was it when David allowed himself to look with impure eyes upon Bathsheba: the lust of the eye led to adultery: and adultery led on to murder. You know how weeds spread, how soon they run to seed, and how a score may spring up from the seed of a single one. So it is with vices. They too shed their seed, and increase and multiply in such a way, that a man who is indulging in any one evil practice now, will be most fortunate if he has not a couple such by this time twelvemonth, and half-a-dozen more the year after. Now of all the commandments, the one that people are the aptest to make light of, and to begin by breaking, is this one



which commands us to keep the sabbath holy. Those who would think it a shameful thing to lie or to steal, those who would think it a horrible thing to commit murder or adultery, young lads more especially, will idle about on Sunday, and waste the precious hours which God has given them to learn his will, and to pray to him for strength that they may do it. They know not what they are doing. They think there is little harm in this. All those shortsighted, worldly-minded persons too, who look no further than the immediate outward consequences of an action, cannot see much harm in it. "Poor lads!" (they will say,) "they have been hard at work all the week: why should not they have the Sunday to amuse themselves?" And yet this one fault,—let me rather say, this one sin, of sabbath-breaking, has been the mother of thousands and thousands of crimes. Half the criminals, whose lives pay the forfeit of their offences, half the criminals who end their days on the gallows, begin their career of wickedness with breaking the sabbath. By keeping away from church, they deprive themselves of all instruction: they gradually lose all knowledge and all fear of God: they cease to pray for his help, and so they are left without help: temptation comes upon temptation; they fall from one wickedness to another; until at length even in this world justice overtakes them, and gives them over to a shameful death.

On the other hand, it is by endeavouring heartily and diligently to keep the whole of God's law in all its breadth and fullness, that we shall best gain strength to keep any one part of it. For all the commandments support and uphold and strengthen each other, and form a fence round such as continue within them, through which the fouler temptations can hardly enter. When a man strives thus to serve God with his whole heart, God will grant such a man grace to serve him better and better. Him who is faithful, if he be

in truth faithful, in a little, he will enable to be faithful in more. While they who break the sabbath lose the knowledge and the fear of God, and are hurried on from one wickedness to another, they who hallow God's holy day, they who spend it reverently and devoutly, in learning his will, and in prayer and thanksgiving, will grow in the knowledge of God, will increase in his love, and will be enabled to mount from grace to grace. Thus will their earthly sabbaths prepare and fit them for worshipping and serving him hereafter in the everlasting rest of the blessed, in the eternal sabbath of heaven.



XLII.

THE GOOD OF THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE SECOND TABLE.

DEUTERONOMY vi. 24.

The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day.

IN my last two sermons I have spoken to you of the first four commandments, which make up what is commonly called the first table of the law. It is so called, because the commandments given to Moses were engraved on two tables of stone. On the first table were engraved the first four commandments, which relate to our duty toward God,—that we are to have no other gods but him only,—that we are to abstain from every kind of idol-worship,—that we are to reverence his name and his day, and to honour them, and keep them holy. These are the commandments of the first table, which contains our duty to God. Were we all so many hermits, made to live each by himself, having no ties or dealings with other men, the first table of the law would perhaps have been sufficient; as in that case man would have owed no duties, except to God only. God however did not form men to live alone, but to live together in society. A man can hardly contrive, even if he wishes it, to withdraw himself altogether from the fellowship of his

brother men. A man can hardly say to himself, "I will live quite alone." Look at the state in which we come into the world. Every man is born a member of some family. Every man is born subject to some government. For the greater part of men are born with the necessity of betaking themselves, when they grow up, to some trade or calling for their livelihood. Even the few who can afford to live without a profession, must have estates or property of some kind to look after: and the care of that property, the business which must needs arise out of it, cannot but bring them into contact with their fellow-men. Thus has God in the order of his providence united every man to his fellows by a triple tie,—by the tie of family,—by the tie of country,—and lastly, by the tie of necessity for all who are not very rich, and by the tie of interest for those who are. We are all twined together and interwoven, as it were, into one great web or network of society, like the threads of flax, or the locks of wool, in a piece of linen or broadcloth; and this without any choice of ours. Nobody is asked whether he will be born in a cottage or in the house of a lord. Nobody is asked whether he will be born in England, or among the savages abroad. Nobody is asked whether he chooses to come into the world to earn a livelihood by his labour, or whether he would rather enter it as the heir to a great estate. But if we do not come into the world by our own choice, nor pick out the place we are to fill in it, by whose choice and determination are we sent here, some to fill a higher station, some a lower? Plainly, my brethren, it must be by God's determination. He alone settles beforehand in what rank and station we are to be born: he no more consults us, or allows us to have a choice about the matter, than the weaver allows his wool or flax to have a choice as to what piece of cloth they shall be put into. Some are destined to coarser purposes, some to finer, but all according to the

judgment of the weaver, without any choice or will of theirs. So it is with us. In weaving the great web of human life and society, the heavenly workmaster has not made it all of one quality. Some parts are finer, some coarser: and in some places the coarse threads and the fine are so wonderfully intermingled and twisted together, that it would be impossible to part them without tearing the whole to pieces. In like manner will it be, if the attempt is ever made to separate the rich and poor in England. Everything which has hitherto made up the beauty and glory and strength and comfort of this nation, will be rent to tatters in the struggle, and will be as utterly destroyed, as a piece of fine cloth would be, if a man were mischievous enough to pick out and separate the Saxon wool in it from the English. Saxon or English, it is all wrought up into one cloth, and cannot now be separated: and so it is with the network of society. Rich and poor have all been woven up together, and an attempt to sever the one from the other, unless it be stopped in time, would end in the ruin of both.

Hitherto I have been shewing you, how we are all sent into the world, not to live by ourselves, or for ourselves, but to be connected and united with our fellow-creatures in divers ways, first as members of the same family, then as subjects of the same government, and lastly as dwellers in the same neighbourhood, where,—whether we work with our own hands, or employ others to work for us,—we are all dependent one upon another. Such is the state every man is born in: and out of that state has arisen an answering set of duties. Had we been made to live alone, we should only have owed duty to God. But being made to live together in society, we likewise owe duties to society. We owe a duty to our family: we owe a duty to our sovereign: we owe a duty to every one, rich or poor, with whom we may have any business or dealings of whatever kind. This

second set of duties arising out of our being made to live together in society, is commonly called our duty toward our neighbour. The heads of these duties are set down in the second table of the commandments, just as the heads of our duty toward God are set down in the first table.

Nor is it to be wondered at that they are set down there, —that the heads of our duties toward our neighbours were proclaimed in the ears of the children of Israel by the voice of God himself. For so dependent are we on each other's behaviour for peace and happiness, and even for life itself, that, were a people ever to break loose from God's commandments, and to throw off the restraints of laws, and to take to living every one as he pleased, following the rule of might, instead of right,—there would be neither happiness, nor quiet, nor comfort,—in fact, there would be no living among such a people. You have all heard the sad story in the Gospel of the man who was possessed by a legion of devils; and you may perhaps remember how it fared with him,—that he was exceeding fierce, so that no man could pass that way for fear of him; nor could any one tame him; but day and night he wandered about far from any home, and cutting himself with stones. Now the state of a people so madly frantic as to throw off all regard to God's commandments, would not be unlike the state of this poor unhappy wretch. Like him they would be possessed by a legion of evil passions and evil spirits. Like him they would be untamably wild and fierce, ready to harm and maltreat every one who came in their way. Like him they would be without a home: for how could such a blessed thing as home exist, without the safeguards of justice and purity and religion? Like him lastly, they would be for ever hurting and paining and grieving themselves and one another. All these evils came upon the unhappy wretch in the New Testament, because the devils had taken possession of him. Yet they possessed only his body and his mind: for it does

not appear that the demoniacs, as they are called, were wicked men; but only that they were driven mad by the power of some evil spirit. Can we doubt then that miseries, at least equal to his, would overtake a people such as I have been speaking of, a people that had thrown off all regard to God's commandments, and had given itself up to work iniquity with greediness, and so had invited a host of devils to come and take possession of their souls? For this must follow. Man must have one master or other. He must serve some higher power. If he will not serve God, the holy and the merciful, whose wages is everlasting life, he must go into servitude to sin and Satan, whose wages is misery and death. Therefore if a man or any number of men, throw off the yoke of God's commandments, they do not become independent thereby, whatever they may fancy. They only change one master and one yoke for another master and another yoke. They only leave the service of God, and shake off the easy yoke of righteousness, to enter into the service of the devil, and to bend their necks under the grievous yoke of sin. Were a people to break away from God's commandments in the way I have been supposing, they would by that very act make themselves over to Satan; and so we should have a people whose very souls were possessed by a legion of evil spirits. Think then, what they must suffer. Think, what passions they would be a prey to. Think, how they would be racked and tormented and torn this way and that by a thousand desires, too wild and fierce to be gratified, and which, even if they could be gratified, would yield them no contentment. Think again of the fears that would be ever haunting them,—fears of losing everything they prized in the world. For in a country so wicked there would be no safety. No one would be able to feel safe at his house, or that his wife or his daughters might not be taken away from him before evening. And

lawful redress for such injuries there could be none among a people with whom might made right.

Such would be the state of a people living without the second table of the law of Moses, or something at least answering thereto. I do not ask you whether it would be a happy one. This is a question you can both put and answer for yourselves. You all know what alarm and distress and confusion in a neighbourhood a single murder, a single rape, a single robbery, when attended by any outrageous violence, is sure to occasion. What then must be the misery of a land, which was full of murder, of blood, of outrage, of oppression, of violence and crime of every sort! It would be a hell upon earth. And no wonder: for it would be the devil's land; and where the devil is, there must be hell also. He would make a hell even of heaven.

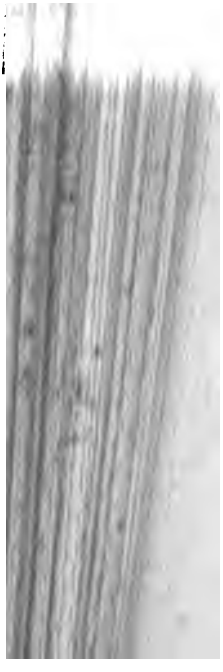
It was to save his people from this manifold misery, that God gave them the commandments contained in the second table of the law, in which the chief heads of their duties to each other were set before them in a few words. What is said in the text of all the Lord's statutes, is more especially true of these commandments, that the Lord commanded us to do them for our good. Nothing can be shorter than most of them are: and yet, so great is their wisdom and their excellence, that any country which observed even the letter of them would be free from almost every great crime; while, if any people endeavoured to keep them not in the letter only, but in the spirit,—if any people or nation were wise enough to obey them in all the length and breadth and height and depth of their full meaning,—such a people would not only be free from crime, but would enjoy a peace, a quiet, a security and tranquillity, and a degree of prosperous, undisturbed, rightful happiness, far surpassing anything which has ever been seen upon earth. The prophecy of Isaiah would be more than fulfilled among so just and righteous a

people. We should see the wolf dwelling with the lamb, and the leopard lying down with the kid, and the calf with the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child leading them. That is, in such a land we should see the most perfect unity and concord, between all persons of all ranks and conditions. We should see tempers, naturally as fierce and violent as the leopard and the young lion, keeping within the rules of peaceableness and good order. There would be no taking advantage of the weak, the innocent, or the rich, who are now as welcome a booty to the needy and reckless, as the kids and lambs and fatlings are to beasts of prey. All would live together harmoniously: and this, not from the dread of human laws,—for the government might be mild and gentle as the guidance of a little child,—but from a far worthier motive,—from the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his Majesty, as the prophet has expressed it in another place. In such a land the sucking child might safely play upon the hole of the asp, and the weaned child might put its hand into the cockatrice's den. That is to say, innocence would be secured from secret fraud, as well as from open force: so that, to sum up all in the words of the same prophet, none should hurt or destroy in all that holy kingdom. Such would be the state of a people who kept all the commandments of the second table, in the fullness of their spiritual purport. There could be no evil strife of any kind among that people: for that is forbidden by the sixth commandment. There could be no lewdness or impurity: for that is forbidden by the seventh. There could be no injustice, no oppression, no over-reaching, no taking advantage of a neighbour's ignorance, or of his necessities: there could be no petty frauds or petty thefts of any kind: for all these things are forbidden by the eighth commandment. Again, there could be no speaking untruly of our neighbour, no evil-speaking of him: talebear-

ing, backbiting, slandering, putting a hard or unkind meaning on the actions of others,—all these things would be banished out of this land, as being contrary to the ninth commandment. Moreover covetousness and greedy desires of every kind, be it of gain, be it of honours, be it of rank, be it of praise and glory,—these too would be clean rooted out, being forbidden by the tenth commandment. Lastly, all the family virtues, all the kindly affections, all those amiable and gentle qualities, which make a man beloved, and are the honey and sugar of human life, rendering it sweet and pleasant,—these good qualities would be nursed and fostered by the spirit of the fifth commandment, and would strengthen and spread throughout the land, till the whole kingdom, however large, would be so knit together, man to man, and house to house, by affectionate feelings and friendly offices,—all the people of the country caring for each man in it, and each doing his best for the good of all, —that the nation would grow to be like one great family, joined together by brotherly kindness, and governed by a voice of love.

Such and no less than this would be the happiness of a people acting fully up to the spirit of the commandments of the second table. Therefore we ought to feel most grateful to Almighty God, for having called us to the knowledge of laws so excellent that, if men would only keep, they would live and be happy by them. Do not tell me of human frailty, nor argue that man in a natural state is unable to do all this. For this, though true, is nothing to the present purpose. We are not in a natural state: we have been admitted into covenant with Christ: we have the promise of the Spirit, if we will ask for it in prayer. Whatever may be the case with others, we at least can keep these laws, through Christ that strengthens us. The feelings therefore, which I would have you cherish, when you think of these command-

ents, are thankfulness to our heavenly Father, for having ven us these laws for our good, and shame, because we, disobedient sons, have profited so little by his goodness. I have shewn you what would be the state of a country, here the commandments were made the rule of life. Compare the picture with the present state of England: and you ll see how much we lose, even in this life, by not keeping em better. Why are there so many laws in England, and many trials, and so many gaols, and so many punishents of all kinds? Simply because men will not keep the mmandments which God has given them. If they would so, faithfully and heartily, these six commandments of e second table would stand us instead of all those acts of rliament, which shew what labour and skill are needed man to keep his neighbour from doing wrong, and how, spite of punishment upon punishment, new crimes are er sprouting up. But men will not be good and happy the way which God has pointed out to them. They will ek out bypaths of happiness for themselves, by oppression, d by cheating and robbing one neighbour of his property, other of his wife, a third of his good name. Therefore man laws are perforce called in, to frighten men, if ssible, from those evil ways, which else they persist in lowing. Alas! is it always to be thus? Are thy commandments, O Lord, always to be made the sport of wicked d ungodly men? Hasten, we beseech thee, that time, hen all the words of thy prophets shall be fulfilled, when thy commandments shall be kept in spirit and in truth, hen they shall neither hurt nor destroy in all thy holy ountain, and when the earth shall be filled with the knowlge of thee, as the waters cover the sea. Amen.



Children, obey your
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safely: because in these commandments God has given us safety,—not only for our lives, but also for the chastity of our wives, without which there can be no comfort; for our property, whether small or great; and lastly for our characters, protecting them from false swearers and evil-speakers. Whoever is protected in these four main points,—whoever is duly defended in his life, in his family, in his possessions, and in his character,—has every safeguard which laws or governors can bestow. Such is the goodly edifice which God has raised for his people, an edifice provided with safety for everything that men most love and value. The property of every one, the life of every one, the domestic comforts of every one, and the good name of every one, from the king on his throne to the labourer in his cottage, have all their especial place assigned to them in this goodly edifice, or mansion of God's law.

Now what is the first story of this goodly mansion? What is the first commandment, which God laid down for the others to rise and spring from? what is the first material of social happiness which God has given to his people? The first material of all, that God prepared for us, when providing for our social happiness, the first thing he made a law about, was the obedience of children to their parents. The commandment which ordains that children should honour their father and mother, holds the first place in the second table. It comes even before that commandment which protects our lives by forbidding murder. The dutiful obedience of children then is thus declared by God to be the foundation of all social happiness, and of every social virtue. It is the first and chief thing to be looked to, as being the likeliest root for the others to grow from. Therefore did God place the fifth commandment at the head of the second table; to teach us that this duty is the head and source of all the other social duties.

The behaviour of a child to its parents then is no such trifle as too many perverse children, and too many foolish parents, are prone to fancy it. How often do we hear mothers saying, "It is only the poor child's way; it is a little pettish and fractious at times: but it means no harm by it. To be sure it does not mind me quite so well as it ought to do; but children will be children." So the child goes on uncorrected, and grows up disobedient and undutiful. That is, it grows up with habits and dispositions of heart and mind so evil, that God has classed them with the very worst crimes, with false swearing, and theft, and adultery, and even with murder. If undutifulness in children had been a mere trifle, would God have put it into this black list? We may be certain therefore, that there is more evil in it than meets the eye. Either it must be worse in itself, or it must be more dangerous, or more mischievous, than we suspect: or at least the contrary virtue, the virtue of obedience, must be more excellent and important. Indeed it requires no very deep search into the matter, to find two prime qualities in this duty of children to obey their parents,—first, the reasonableness and justice of the thing in itself, and secondly, its use in forming the character of the child. These, if I mistake not, are two of the qualities which make obedience to parents of so much value and importance, that God has even vouchsafed to win us to it by marking it with a peculiar blessing.

As to the reasonableness and justice of this duty, can any one doubt it, who thinks what a child is? Look at a baby, and see what a poor helpless thing it is. Consider how entirely it depends on its parents for food and warmth and clothing, and indeed for everything. It could not live a day, but for their care and kindness. Think of the trouble and anxiety, the careful days and wakeful nights, which an infant costs its mother by its sicknesses. There is all the rearing



of them, especially when they are delicate. What plant from the Indies is so difficult to rear, or needs such constant care and watching, as a delicate sickly child? Think of the wear and tear in the mother's heart,—I have often seen it,—during that rearing. It is not the child-bearing, so much as the child-rearing,—it is the watching the cradle with patient eye day after day for hours together,—it is the care and fear and anxiety and weariness while nursing children through their illnesses, that drive the colour from the mother's cheek, and make it pale and wan before its time. Children! children! what do you owe to your mothers, whose hearts you have thus sorely tried, and who have thus sacrificed so much of their strength for you, that you might live and grow up and be strong! It is true, we can none of us remember the pains and anxiety, which we must all have cost our mothers in our infancy. But we may give a good guess, by observing the care and pains they bestow on our younger brothers and sisters. Whatever pains and anxieties these may cost our mother, we may be sure that we in our infancy must have cost her nearly the same. Therefore I would have every one of you, boys and girls, that now hear me, when you see your mothers nursing a baby, and watching over it,—I would have you say to yourselves: "So must she have nursed me; so must she have watched over me: I must have needed all this looking after: I must have put her to all this trouble: I must have been treated with all this tenderness." If you would think in this way of what your mothers must have done for you, you could not help feeling what a debt of thankfulness and love you owe them. It is the only return you can make to your parents, for all they have done for you during your infancy, for all that they are still doing and feeling for you during your childhood, yea, and for years after. For a mother's heart is not like the heart of an animal, which when its young have ceased

to suck, drops them out of its memory. The human heart is of more lasting stuff. The impressions which God makes, when he writes on it with the pen of nature, if the heart is of the right kind, last for ever. The mother, the good mother at least, will go on caring for her children long, long after they have become men and women. Let them be men and women to others; to her they will always be children. When her sons and daughters marry, you will see her grow young again for joy: and she will take to nursing and loving and looking after their children, almost as if they were her own. So strong and lasting is a mother's love, that, while other animals drive their young away, as soon as they can feed themselves, the love of human parents descends and prolongs itself even to their offspring's offspring.

But this is only the outward and visible sign, and is next to nothing when compared to the inward feelings. Their fears, their wishes, their prayers for your soul's welfare, their eagerness to mark every hopeful sign of godliness and goodness in you,—the delight they take in thinking and speaking of every little token of kindness and affection that you may shew them,—these are the true and touching proofs how imperishable a mother's love is; and in return for that love, so long as they are in this world, you will owe them, and should rejoice to pay them, a still increasing debt of duty and gratitude and affection. For this is the only payment they ask for, in return for all their tenderness and care and anxiety in watching over you. They only want love for love; a love of course suitable to the difference which God has placed between you. For you must never forget that you are the child, and she the parent: you received life from her, and she gave life to you, and carried you in her arms, and fed you from her own breasts. Therefore your love must be not love merely, but dutiful love, such as it

befits a child to cherish for its parent, a love shewing itself in acts of gentleness and respect and kindness, and above all, till you are quite grown up, in the strictest and readiest obedience.

I have spoken only of the debt which children owe to their mother: but you will easily understand that there must be a like debt owing to the father also. The commandment says, "Honour thy father and thy mother," putting the father first. For he is the head of his family; he supports it by his labour; he rules the house: therefore to him, as the master and the head, who provides for and supplies the wants of all, the fullest love and respect and obedience are plainly due.

Children, you see, are not only bound to love their parents, but likewise to obey them, and that, not from constraint, nor from the fear of blows, but readily and willingly and cheerfully. The obedience paid for the fear of stripes is the obedience of a mule, not of a son. What I should desire to see paid to parents throughout the land, is that perfect, that entire and willing obedience, which belongs to christian sons, that is, to sons who take Jesus for their example. Even he, the Son of God, the King of glory, the Saviour of the world, was subject, during his childhood and youth, to his earthly parents. Surely then it must be right and fitting for earthly children to obey theirs. I am aware, this strict and ready obedience, which does everything it is bid, as soon as it is bid, without asking why or wherefore, —this unquestioning obedience, I am aware, is rather out of date. But God's words are still true, and God's commandments are still good and reasonable, whatever the world, which is at enmity with God, may think or say. For look at the mind of a child, and see whether that, as well as its body, is not poor and weak and helpless. What does a child know? What can a child know, save what its parents

teach it? Its parents for a time stand in the place of God to it; as such, it must believe them and obey them, and not only during the years of early childhood, but long after. For, as the baby is ignorant of what belongs to babyhood, so is the boy ignorant of what belongs to boyhood, and the youth too is ignorant of what belongs to his age. There is the same difference between a father and son, a mother and daughter, as between a person who knows a road and one who does not. If any of you wanted to walk across the country to Salisbury, you would not think of starting till you had spoken with a friend who had gone the way before. If that friend told you to avoid a particular spot, where the river had overflowed its banks, and, instead of following the vale, to strike up the hill, where the path, though a little rougher, was dryer and shorter and better, you would mind what he said, and follow his directions. Now is not the road of life more difficult to find out than the road to Salisbury? and is not the heart of a parent more anxious for your welfare, than a common wayfaring acquaintance, that you should hesitate to listen to the advice your parents give you when starting on the journey of life? "Hear, ye children," (says Solomon,) "the instructions of a father; for I give you good doctrine:" and again, "Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings, for I have taught thee in the way of wisdom: I have led thee in right paths. When thou runnest thou shalt not stumble." (Prov. iv. 1, 10.) Solomon stored up the treasures of his wisdom for the good of his son Rehoboam. But that son did, like too many sons nowadays: he shut his ears against his father's advice, and cast off his father's old experienced counsellors, and listened to the young men who had grown up with him, and who were no wiser than himself. The Book of Kings tells us the consequences: Rehoboam lost ten out of the twelve tribes: and the kingdom of Israel was rent from that of Judah,

never to be reunited to it even to this day. Your parents indeed have not the wisdom of Solomon; nor does the fate of a kingdom depend on your obeying them: but they have your welfare at heart: and they have that experience in the ways of life, which you want. You may be the better for their experience; you may profit by their warnings; you may learn from their lessons. All these advantages a child throws away, that does not listen to his parents.

But even if the benefits of obedience were less plain, it must be always wise and reasonable to do what God has commanded us. And it is expressly written in the Bible: "Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well pleasing to the Lord." (Col. iii. 20.) This blessing too is pronounced in Jeremiah upon the Rechabites: "Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you; therefore thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever." (Jer. xxxv. 18, 19.)

Thus far I have tried to shew you how just and reasonable it is that children should honour and obey their parents. But there is another very important view of the matter yet behind. I mean, the use and benefit to the child itself, of training it up from infancy to regular and prompt obedience. This is a matter which concerns the parents quite as much as the child. For if it be of great advantage to a child to be trained up in habits of obedience, it becomes the duty of every parent to train up a child in such habits.

Now what in my mind gives this duty its chief title to be considered the source and wellspring of so many others, is, that, to fulfil it, a child must be brought up, from the moment it can understand anything, to obey its parents readily and cheerfully, without any of those loitering steps and angry tears and sullen looks, which one too often sees in children;

but which no good and thinking man can witness without sorrow: so clearly does such backwardness and sullenness prove that there is an evil root in the heart of the child, which, if it be not closely watched, will assuredly bring forth fruits of stubbornness and disobedience. And what fruits can be worse? Hear what the Scripture says of them: "Rebellion and disobedience is like the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is like idolatry." That is to say, stubbornness and disobedience are so bad in God's sight, that no sins can well be worse. It is true, the disobedience and stubbornness condemned in this passage are against God, not against man. But, as St. John reasons about love, that, if a man love not his brother whom he has seen, he cannot love God whom he has not seen: so may we also reason about obedience, that, if a child does not learn to obey its earthly parents, neither will it obey its heavenly Father. It is in the school of home, amid the little hardships and restraints and crosses and disappointments which every child must needs meet with, that the great lesson of obedience is best learnt: as it is written even of Christ himself; "Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. v. 8.) Now in no place is this obedience, which we have all such great need to learn somewhere, to be learnt so easily and with so little suffering, as in our father's house, in childhood. For then we have no habits to unlearn. The obstinacy and perverseness of our natures are still in the bud. They have not blossomed and seeded. They have not yet grown hard and tough with age. They have not struck their crooked roots deep into every corner of the heart, nor twisted them, as they are sure to do in later life, when suffered to grow unchecked, round every violent passion and evil disposition, strengthening them, and strengthened by them. These things which make the cure of obstinacy and perverseness so difficult in a grown-up

person, in a child do not yet exist. Therefore, as it is easier to draw the tooth of a child than of a grown-up person, because their teeth have no fangs, and ours have: so it is easier to break and cut down that perverseness and obstinacy which we are all born with, in a child than in a grown-up person; and for the very same reason: because their perverseness has had no time to strike its fangs into their heart.

The sum of the matter is this. There is a root of self-will born in every man; and it is one of the worst parts of that corrupt nature which we have all inherited from Adam. But this is not the worst: for out of this root of self-will grow two evil and misshapen stems. One of these stems is pride; the other stem is disobedience. This is our state by nature. We have all a natural dislike to be ruled or counselled, even to our own good. We have all a stem of pride, and a stem of disobedience, growing out of that evil root of self-will, which we all brought with us into the world, and which is our portion of the stock of Adam. Now if these stems were allowed to shoot up and grow, until pride had overshadowed and darkened our mind, and disobedience had filled our hearts, what room would be left for godliness and righteousness? Would not the heart and mind and soul be full of qualities the most opposite and hostile to the heavenly graces which Christ requires from all such as love him and believe in him? Christ requires us to have no will of our own, and to make the will of God our only rule of action. What hope is there that this will be done by any one who has accustomed himself to make his own will his idol? Christ requires us to be humble-minded. How hard a lesson is this for a man whose mind is filled with pride? Christ requires us to be obedient. But how can any one become so, who has grown up a child of disobedience? You may as well expect water to burn, and fire to wet,—you



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God desires to see us all walk in,—the way of humility, of self-denial, and of obedience. These three are very closely joined together. A man can scarcely be humble and self-denying, without being likewise obedient. On the other hand, though a man may be kept from this or that crime by the dread of punishment, by shame, by the fear of consequences, by want of inclination,—though a man may be kept by motives of this sort from committing great crimes, and even from indulging in gross sins,—he will never be obedient to the whole law of love, without being at the same time humble and self-denying. It is so even in earthly love: and this is the great blessing of earthly love: that it is a school of self-denial. There will ever be some pleasure to sacrifice, some interest to give up, some affront or slight to overlook: and how is a man to do these things, who has not learnt to practise self-denial? So that these three principles are very closely linked together. The principle of humility, which teaches us to esteem and honour others above ourselves; the principle of self-denial, which weans us from the pleasures and the treasures, the toys and joys of this world, and leads us cheerfully to forego any of them, if it comes into competition with our duty; and the principle of strict obedience to every commandment of God, —and for his sake likewise to every lawful commandment of those men who have a claim and title to our obedience; as our parents in the first place, then our schoolmasters and teachers, the sovereign, and all who are in authority, our masters, if we happen to be servants, and our superiors of every degree.

For this humility, this self-denial, and this obedience, what school can be so excellent as a family where the fifth commandment is duly kept? Think of these words, Honour thy father and thy mother: and see how very much they contain. It is not the mere outward act of

obedience that is here required from us,—it is honour,—a large word, embracing many particulars of duty, inward respect, outward reverence, and every kind of real service. So that children are called upon by this fifth commandment, not only to shew their parents the highest respect outwardly, but also to cherish the feelings of grateful love and reverence for them inwardly. Yes, children, you must obey your parents; you must wait upon them, when you grow old enough: you must perform such services for them as they may stand in need of; you must assist them in all things to the utmost of your power. In old age and sickness you must do your best to make them comfortable, not grumbling at the task, not thinking it wearisome, but rather rejoicing that you have an opportunity of shewing your gratitude to your parents, by nursing and taking care of them in their old age, in return for all the care and nursing which you received from them in your infancy. This, and nothing short of this, is honouring your father and your mother.

Now how much humility and self-denial, as well as how much obedience, must be learnt in the practice of these things! They cannot be done by a proud, disobedient, stubborn child, who is not ready to give up its own wishes to the wishes and directions of its parents. Thus the fifth commandment is a kind of practical school, where the child, in obeying its parents, learns to obey all to whom it owes obedience. In giving up its little fancies to please its parents, it learns the duty of sacrificing self to others. And what lessons can be more necessary? or when are these lessons likely to be learnt, if they are not learnt in childhood? So that this commandment is twofold. While it speaks directly to children, and shews them how they are to behave toward their parents, it also teaches parents how and in what spirit they are to bring up their children. Children, honour your

parents, and obey them in all things; for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Parents, bring up your children to honour and obey you: teach them to honour and obey you in God's stead. So, when they pass from under your wing, may they, who have been obedient to their earthly, become obedient to their heavenly Father.

XLIV.

LOVE, THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.

ROMANS xiii. 8—10.

He that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law. For this,—Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment,—it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

THE foundations of that godly edifice of law and duty, which the commandments, when put together, form, having been already treated of in my former sermons, I shall now proceed briefly to examine the upper parts of the building. You have had your duty to God set before you. You have been taught that covetousness is a worship of Mammon, that lust is a worship of Belial, that malice and revenge is a worship of Moloch, and that consequently they who indulge these, or indeed any other evil desires and evil passions, sacrifice, as St. Paul expresses it, to devils. So that these three mother vices, hatred, sensuality, and covetousness, are all clean contrary to that first and great commandment, "Thou shalt have none other gods but me." Here then is one great foundation laid for the edifice of law and duty, which I will call the foundation of piety. But further, what you owe to your parents has likewise been

set before you: and in speaking on that point, so much was said about the great evil and danger of self-will and pride and disobedience, and the opposite graces of self-denial and humility and obedience were so urged on your minds, that here another great foundation was also laid, which I will call the foundation of self-abasement.

Now these two foundations are not only broad and deep enough to support the whole weight of our duty both to God and man; they are also capable of furnishing a great part of the materials for the building. For just as the builder, who would build solidly, must build the whole of goodly stone, hewing the materials for his foundation and for his superstructure out of the same quarry, so is it in religion. Here too, after self-abasement has sunk the ground deep, and piety has laid its foundations solidly,—here too, after the man has been emptied of his wilful self, and filled with the will of God instead,—the same principles of godliness and self-denial are requisite to carry up the building heavenward. Without godliness to carry it on, the building is like to come to a stand: without straight and strict and severe lines of self-denial and humility, to keep every act and thought in its place, the building will be sure to bilge somewhere. The walls will have their weak side; a skilful eye will discover a swelling out in it, like a breach ready to fall; and sooner or later it will come down. So important are the two principles of godliness and self-abasement, not to the foundations merely, but likewise to the whole edifice of duty.

Well, then, supposing these principles laid in and provided for you, what more is wanting to complete the edifice? Only the cement of love. Therefore, instead of taking you through the last five commandments, one by one, I have chosen a text from St. Paul, which classes all the five together, and declares them to be all included under the

universal law of love. "He that loveth another," (says that apostle,) "hath fulfilled the law. For this,—Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment,—it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thus far what the apostle says must be plain and clear to all. No man can have any difficulty in understanding, that, if we love a man, we shall not try to kill him, nor to draw the affections of his wife from him, nor to rob him, nor to tell lies of him, nor to do him any other injury. So far all is clear. But St. Paul goes a step further. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Love is the fulfilling of the law: what does that mean? To fulfil a thing is to fill it full, so that no part of it is left void or empty. Thus we pray in the Communion Service, that all who have partaken of that holy communion,—all, that is, who have partaken of the body and blood of their Saviour Christ, spiritually set before them in that holy sacrament,—may be fulfilled, or fully filled, with God's grace and benediction. We pray that they may be brimful of grace and blessings, so that no part of them may be left empty of grace, no part of them unguarded and unhallowed by the Spirit of our Lord and Saviour. This is the meaning of fulfilling. It is an image taken from a cup filled as full as it can hold; and it is applied, both in Scripture and in the language of common life, to a great number of things. In the Book of Exodus we read, that Pharaoh's taskmasters required the children of Israel, after the straw had been taken from them, to fulfill their daily task in making bricks as before; that is, they were required to give in fully as many bricks as they had been accustomed to make during the time when straw was given to them. The tale, or quantity, of bricks demanded of them was not

to be diminished. In the same way, to fulfil a promise is to keep it fully and completely: and so to fulfil a duty is to discharge it fully and completely, leaving no part of it neglected or unperformed.

After this, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving how much St. Paul means by fulfilling the law. He means that we should do everything it requires of us to the very utmost. We are punctually and exactly to give in every single one of the tale of bricks, or rather of the fine hewn stones, which God demands from us toward building up the edifice of duty. We are not to break, or to neglect, or to overlook any part of any one of the commandments, under the pretence that it is a little one, that it is a trifle, that it cannot signify, that there is no good in being too particular,—remembering the words of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, that whosoever shall break the very least of these commandments, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. That is to say, he shall be considered a most unworthy member of Christ's kingdom even here, and therefore, I need not add, can have no chance of being admitted into Christ's glorious and everlasting kingdom hereafter.

Now it is well worth our notice, that, when Jesus uttered this awful threat against any one who presumed to break any one of God's commandments, even in the least tittle, he was speaking of the very point which St. Paul speaks of in the text. He was speaking, as his great ambassador and messenger to the Gentiles, the apostle Paul, spoke afterward, of fulfilling the law. "Think not, (these are his words,) think not I am come to destroy the law. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Whosoever therefore," (I pray you, mark this word, *therefore*,) "shall break one of these least commandments, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,

ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. v. 17-20.) As if he had said, "I am come to fulfil the law of Moses: I am come to shew you the exceeding depth of God's commandments: I am come to shew you how much they require of every one, when they are taken in their full meaning. This is one great object of my coming. Therefore, if any person fancies I am come to bring men a licence for sinning,—if any one conceives he may continue in sin, because I have brought grace and pardon into the world,—he quite mistakes the purpose of my coming. The Father sent me, not to abolish holiness, nor to diminish aught from it, but to set it upon a stronger foundation, and to give it its just limits; so that it shall embrace, not only the outward actions of men, but their very thoughts and wishes. I am come to fulfil the law, not to make it void. Nay, so far am I from intending to weaken it in any one point, or to take aught from it, that on the contrary I require a much more perfect service from my disciples than has hitherto been deemed necessary. The righteousness which you admire so much in the scribes and Pharisees, is not enough to satisfy me. Except your righteousness exceed theirs, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

It seems to follow from what has been said, that the fulfilling of the law spoken of in the text is keeping it in its fullest, its deepest, its most spiritual meaning. And what is that? What is the full breadth and length and depth of the sixth commandment, and of the seventh, and of the eighth, and of the ninth? How much do they contain? So far as the sixth and seventh are concerned, the question need not trouble us: since our Saviour himself has pointed out how much these two commandments require from us, in order to their true fulfilment. And though he confined himself to the two commandments against murder and adultery, yet,

by observing the principles he laid down concerning them, and by applying the same principles to the commandments against theft, and false witness, and coveting, we shall have no difficulty in making out how these commandments also should be fulfilled.

To begin then with the sixth and seventh: our Saviour, after giving his disciples to understand that the narrow view which the scribes and Pharisees had been wont to take of their duty, in their shallow righteousness, must now be enlarged and widened, proceeds as follows: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matt. v. 21, 22, 27, 28.) Now, without entering into a detailed examination of these words, thus much is clear at first sight, that in them our Saviour extends the prohibition against murder from the hand to the heart, forbidding, not merely the act of murder, and therewith every kind of lesser violence against our neighbours' persons, but also all reproachful and insolent language: nay, even the feeling of causeless anger is declared to be contrary to the commandment. In the same way he forbids us, not merely to commit adultery, or any other act of uncleanness, but even to look upon a woman with a wanton eye. In both cases he forbids, not merely the gross outward act of sin, but the very least approach to it, even in word or gesture, even in wish or thought.

It is easy to extend the same principle to the eighth and ninth commandments. It is easy to see that our Saviour, had he spoken of them, would have told us to keep our hands from picking, as well as from stealing. He would have forbidden, not only great thefts, but small thefts; not only open robbery, but secret robbery; not only those greater frauds, which human judges punish, but all that cheating, of whatsoever kind, which the laws of man cannot reach. All extortion, according to this rule, comes under the eighth commandment. So does the taking advantage of a neighbour's ignorance, or of his necessities, to drive a hard bargain with him. So do all those things which too many reckon fair,—such as cheating the sovereign's revenue, smuggling and buying of smugglers, poaching and buying of poachers: —all these are breaches of the eighth commandment. So too the neglecting to pay our debts, and even the running into debt beyond what we are quite sure of being able to pay, is a plain breach of the eighth commandment: because, if I get goods from a tradesman, and do not pay him for them, I cheat and defraud him of his goods, just as much as if I carried them off by stealth.

The transition from stealing to lying, from theft to falsehood, is but too natural and easy. It is not difficult to perceive that our Saviour, had he spoken of the ninth commandment, would have given that too a like breadth and depth of meaning. He would doubtless have told us not to lie at all, but to speak truth in all sincerity every one to his neighbour. He would have taught us that not only false witnessing in a court of justice is forbidden by the ninth commandment, but that every uncharitable, every harsh, every ill-natured word, every bad construction which we put upon a neighbour's conduct, every evil motive we impute to him, nay, every unkind and suspicious thought which we suffer ourselves to entertain of him, is bearing false witness against him.

Of the tenth commandment, it may suffice to say that our Saviour, without expressly speaking of it, has nevertheless shewn us how we ought to understand it, in those many passages of his Sermon, where he exhorts us to be poor in spirit, to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, and not on earth, and to dismiss all anxiety about the morrow. If we act on the principle of these heavenly precepts, we shall not only abstain from coveting what belongs to our neighbour, but we shall never covet or vehemently desire anything this earth can give.

Thus it appears that every angry feeling, every wanton thought, every uncharitable and suspicious thought, every unfair advantage and dishonest trick, however it may be allowed to pass free by human laws, and however customary in men's dealings with each other,—all these, and all manner of greediness after the things of this world, are breaches of one or other of the commandments. Nothing short of perfect kindness, perfect purity, perfect honesty, perfect truth, and perfect temperance, will fulfil the law. Nothing short of perfect kindness; because every degree of unkindness is forbidden by the sixth commandment: nothing short of perfect purity; because all impurity is forbidden by the seventh: nothing short of perfect honesty; because every kind of dishonesty is forbidden by the eighth: nothing short of perfect truth; because all falsehood is condemned by the ninth: nothing short of perfect temperance; because all greediness and covetous desires are forbidden by the tenth commandment.

Such are the vast claims which God's law has upon us, when taken in its full extent. Now let me ask you, for claims like these who can give a receipt in full? who can satisfy them? who can hope to satisfy them in any degree? St. Paul tells us,—not indeed how to discharge the debt, so as to be quit of it; for it cannot be discharged: it is per-

petually growing: therefore, when he says, "Owe no man anything," he brings in that remarkable exception, "but to love one another:" as if he had said, the debt of love is one which a Christian must owe for ever. But though this debt is one which cannot be paid off altogether, St. Paul shows us how we may go on making continual payments toward it, by loving our neighbour as ourselves. Love is the fulfilling of the law. If we had perfect love for our neighbour, we should keep these commandments perfectly: and in proportion as love fills us, in the same proportion shall we fulfil them. Love then will enable us to keep the commandments: nothing else will,—no worldly fear, no regard for reputation, not even a sense of duty, unenlightened by the spirit of love. These motives may indeed raise us to the level of the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees; but they are not strong enough to lift us up to that height of righteousness, which Jesus Christ requires from his disciples.

The reason of this is plain. We have a bias in our nature. Therefore so long as we attempt to bowl straight at the mark, without making allowance for that bias, so long we shall be sure to miss it. The bias I speak of is self-love, which we must take care to allow for, and, as it were, to balance with Christian love. That there is such a bias in our nature is plain. Else why should we all be such unfair judges in our own case, and, comparatively speaking, such fair judges in matters we are not concerned in? Any man of common sense can see the rights of a case, where the question is between neighbour and neighbour. Not one in ten, nor in fifty, nor in a hundred, can see the right of the case when the question is between his neighbour and himself. Is not this a plain proof that, in weighing the merits of his own case, he does not use the same scales and weights, as he would do in any other? Where self is concerned, the weight of self-love is sure to slip into one of the

scales: and so they become uneven. Nor is this to be remedied, except by putting that love of our neighbour into the opposite scale, which Christ, and St. Paul after him, commands us to cherish: for this being such a love as we bear to ourselves, by weighing the one against the other, the balance will be righted, and the scales will become true again . . . alas! I cannot say that: for who *does* love his neighbour as fully, as sincerely, and as universally as he loves himself? But in the same proportion in which we do arrive at this perfect love, in the same proportion as we can call up a weight of love to our neighbour in our hearts, to counterbalance our natural selfishness, in the same proportion shall we be fitted for fulfilling the law.

It only remains for us to consider how we are to obtain this love. St. Paul in another place tells us that too. The fruit of the Spirit, he says, is love. But of what spirit? Why, of the Spirit of Christ: as it is written, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, to redeem them that were under the law, that ye might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. iv. 4-6.) By the coming of our Saviour Christ we have been adopted into God's family; and as an earnest of his favour, and to enable us to serve him with the hearts of sons, God has given us the Spirit of Christ, of which Spirit the fruit is love. This is the golden chain and succession and inheritance of blessings: forgiveness, adoption, favour, the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit, the fulfilling of the law. And all this succession and inheritance comes to us as co-heirs with Christ.

You see, brethren, how much cause you have to be joyful for Christ's coming, seeing he has brought you such heavenly gifts. He has opened your eyes to see the breadth and depth of God's commandments. He has given you the

spirit of love, by which alone it is possible to fulfil them. He has reconciled you to God, that you may love God, and has given you the Spirit, that you may serve him. What remains then, but that, as you have been taught the way of God's commandments, so you should strive to walk therein, perfecting holiness in the spirit of love? Love, you see, is of heavenly growth. Cultivate the plant then; nourish it: watch over it; pray for the Holy Spirit to nourish it; and strengthen it in your hearts: and its blossom shall be peace in this life, and its fruit everlasting joy.

XLV.

ANSWERABLE, AND NOT ANSWERABLE;

OR,

WHAT IS CONFIRMATION?

GALATIANS vi. 5.

Every man shall bear his own burthen.

SEVERAL of you are going ere long with God's grace before the bishop to be confirmed. I will therefore take this opportunity of saying a few words to you about confirmation. I shall divide what I have to say into two parts. First I shall tell you what confirmation is not; and next I shall tell you what confirmation is.

First then, as to what confirmation is not: it is not, what some appear to fancy it, a taking of our sins on our own shoulders. There is, I believe, a notion held by many persons, that a child's godfathers and godmothers are answerable for its offences, until it has been to the bishop; after which it is bound to answer for them itself. This, or something like it, is not an uncommon notion: but it is a very mistaken one. There is no being answerable, in the sense in which the word is here understood, for the sins of another. Every one who has a burthen to bear, must bear his own burthen. Every one who has sins to answer for, must

answer for his own sins. The moment a child gets to know right from wrong,—and children begin to acquire that knowledge at a very early age indeed,—that moment does it likewise begin to be answerable before God for what it does. So long as the child did not know right from wrong, so long it was incapable of sinning: for sin consists in doing what we know, or at least ought to know, to be wrong. But when the child has learnt that there is a difference between right and wrong, it has already begun to be a reasonable creature; it has already begun to be answerable for its sins; it has already set out on its journey either toward heaven or toward hell.

Wonder not that I speak thus to you of children. It is the neglecting to consider them in this serious light,—it is the habit of saying, when a child does wrong, "Oh, what does it signify! it is only a child;"—it is the forgetting the trust which God puts into the hands of parents, when he gives them children,—that occasions half the vice and wickedness in the world. While the foolish parent is saying, "It is only a child,"—the seeds of evil are taking root and spreading; sinful habits are forming,—habits of lying perhaps, or habits of sulkiness, or habits of greediness, or habits of anger: and so the child grows up uncorrected and unchecked, into a stubborn lawless boy, or into a bold bad girl, a grief and shame to its father and mother.

Now are we to believe that, for all this stubbornness and naughtiness of all kinds, the boy and girl are not answerable, because the bishop has not laid his hand on their head, and said a prayer over them? That can never be. Verily they must each bear his own burthen. The boy must be prepared to bear the burthen of his sins against God,—the girl must be prepared to bear the burthen of her sins against God,—whether they go to be confirmed or not. I say *sins*: because there is no child,—none at least that

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There is indeed one sense, and that a very important one, in which a child's godfather and godmother, and its teachers, and above all, its parents, may all be said to be answerable for its sins: and that is, when they do not teach it better, —when they do not try to check every mark of evil that they see in it, mildly indeed and gently, but firmly and effectually,—when they neglect any opportunity of turning its heart and thoughts toward God. I spoke just now of the trust that God puts into your hands when he gives you children. And can any trust be greater than that of an innocent and immortal soul, entrusted to its parents in order that they may bring it up from its infancy to fear and love and serve God for ever and ever?

This is the true light to look at children in. They are heirs of immortality: they are candidates for heaven. If parents only thought of them in this way, how carefully would they watch over them! how warmly and heartily would they pray for them! how anxious would they be to talk to them about the great and merciful things that Christ has done and suffered for their souls! These things are not above the comprehension of a child, if told plainly and simply. A very young child may be brought to understand that it was very good of Christ to come down from heaven, where he was living gloriously and happily, for the sake of teaching us and doing us good. A very young child may be brought to understand that it was very good of Christ to suffer pain and death for our sakes, to make us happy. A very young child will be ready to feel that it ought to love and obey Christ for all this goodness. These things are the essence and foundation of Christianity; and when set before a child simply and affectionately, they are the very things to go to its heart. For it happens still, as in our Saviour's time, that these truths, though hidden from many who in this world are wise and prudent, are yet within the reach of babes.

Well then! if a child can be made to understand these things,—if a child can be brought to feel these things,—if a child can be taught to love and obey Christ, to fear God, to lift up its little hands in prayer,—it is the first duty, and ought to be the greatest pleasure of parents to teach their children all these good things. And what excuse can there be for the father and mother who fail to do so? Verily that father and that mother are guilty before God,—guilty of having neglected to do what they were bound to do, for the sake of saving their child from sin and death,—guilty of having starved its soul, by keeping it without the words of everlasting life. Therefore, though it is most certain that every child must bear the burthen of its own wilful sins, it is equally certain that those parents who have failed to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, are answerable to God for their neglect; and the burthen of it will fall on them. So that to such careless parents, and to their ill-taught wicked children, we may apply the awful words of the prophet Ezekiel (iii. 18): "When I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die,—and thou givest him no warning, nor speakest to warn him from his wicked way, to save his life, he shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand." The wicked children shall die in their iniquity; but God will require their blood at the hands of their neglectful parents,—of their parents who are guilty of their blood, shall I say? ah no! worse, far worse! who by their wicked negligence are guilty of their children's everlasting death. Can such guilt be light in God's eyes? No guilt can be light, by which souls are lost to heaven, and led to the brink of hell. Avoid it then, I entreat you, all ye parents, by training up your sons and daughters in the way they should go, by fulfilling the trust which God has committed to you, by caring as much, and doing as much, for the souls of your children, as you care and do for their bodies.

What I have been saying of natural fathers and mothers, applies in a degree to godfathers and godmothers. They too have a sacred trust, a trust which they are the more bound to fulfil, because they have undertaken it of their own accord. No one can force you or me to come to church and stand godfather to this or that child. The act, when we do so, is altogether voluntary. Therefore, after taking the duty on ourselves by our own free choice, we are surely bound to fulfil it faithfully. Now what is that duty? The Prayerbook tells us in the following words, which are addressed to the godfathers and godmothers at the end of the baptismal service: "Forasmuch as the child has promised by you, his sureties, to renounce the devil and all his works, to believe in God, and to serve him, you must remember, that it is your part and duty to see that he be taught, as soon as he is able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession he has here made by you. And you are to provide, or to take care, that he may be brought up virtuously, to lead a godly and christian life." Such is the duty of a godfather and godmother: such, and no other, the burthen they really take upon themselves. They are not answerable for the sins of their godchild: but they are answerable before God and man, for doing their best to have their godchild properly taught his duty, and brought up to lead a christian and godly life.

But perhaps you will tell me, that, in the present state of things, no godfather is able to see to this, however he may wish it: and undoubtedly there is some truth in such an objection. For no godfather is entitled to go uncalled for into his neighbour's house, and interfere with him in the bringing up of his child. This is certainly true. On the other hand, no one need be a godfather, unless he pleases; and no one ought to stand godfather to a child, unless he has reason to believe, from what he knows of its parents,

that it will be brought up in a godly manner, or unless he is prepared, in case the parents are neglectful, to take its religious instruction upon himself. If an irreligious and ungodly father were to ask me to stand godfather to his son, I should certainly feel it my duty to refuse, unless I could expect that I should be allowed to watch over the boy's education myself. Anything is better than undertaking a trust, and then not fulfilling it. In point of fact however, the duty of godfathers and godmothers is not so very difficult to perform, if they set about it in earnest and in the right way. For generally they are the child's near relations: so that they are in the habit of seeing it from its infancy, and can take it on their knees, and hear it say its little prayers, almost as soon as it can speak. And only think how grateful the child, when it grows up, and has learnt to feel the difference between right and wrong, will be to its godfather for having taken such early notice of it, and taught it to pray and to think of God. It will look on him as indeed its godfather, the father of its religion, the father of its piety, the father who has done the most to bring it to the knowledge and love of God.

I have said the more on this head, because I am afraid the office of godfathers and godmothers is too often undertaken without due consideration, and looked upon as little better than a mere form. But this is a false and worldly view. They have a duty to discharge, as we have seen, and that duty a very important one. They are to feel, and to shew an interest about the child's spiritual welfare. They are to embrace every opportunity of teaching it the way of God. This is what they really take upon themselves by becoming sureties for the infant: this it is their part and duty to perform: and if they omit to do so, they will have, for such neglect of their duty, to bear, not their godchild's burthen, but their own.

Thus you see, the meaning of confirmation is not, what some seem to think it, that the child, when it is confirmed, takes its sins upon its own shoulders. What then is its meaning? and for what purpose are children, when they come to years of discretion, carried before the bishop to be confirmed? To confirm a thing is to give some new assurance of its truth, to establish it on fresh grounds, and to make it more certain. If a man bears witness in a court of justice, and I come forward and say that I know his witness to be true, I am said to confirm his testimony. So, when a man makes a bargain or an agreement for me, and I write word that I approve of it, I am said to confirm that bargain or agreement. Now this is just what you are required to do, when you go before the bishop to be confirmed. Your godfathers and godmothers having made an agreement for you, that Christ shall be your Lord, and that you will be his servants, this agreement you are to confirm, by declaring publicly that you approve of it and consent to it. For this reason, before the bishop lays his hands on any of those who come to him, he asks them all this question: "Do you here, in the presence of God, and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptisms, ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you?" And every one who goes to be confirmed, is then to answer, "I do;" that is, "I do here renew the solemn promise which was made in my name at my baptism, that I should faithfully serve and obey God: I do here, as it were, set my hand and seal to the promise, as I would to any law-paper or covenant. I do hereby confirm the promise, and declare that I approve of it; and by God's grace I will keep it to the end of my life."

This is the promise which you are called upon to make, before the bishop lays his hand upon your head. You are called upon to choose the master you will serve, and the way of life you will follow, to declare that choice openly, and to promise solemnly that you will abide by it. The choice must be your own, the resolve and purpose of your own soul, of your own reason, of your own conscience. When you were infants, and unable to promise for yourselves, your godfathers and godmothers made the promise for you. You promised then by proxy, as we call it: but nobody can keep God's commandments by proxy. Else you would find that you would only go to heaven by proxy: and it will be small comfort to us, when we are lying in torments, like the rich man in the parable, to look up and see our godfathers and godmothers happy in heaven. Therefore, now that you are old enough to promise for yourselves, you are called upon to confirm the promises which were made in your names when you were children: you are to take those vows upon yourselves, and having done so, to keep them.

But can you keep them? What says the Scripture? It is God that giveth us both to will, and to do. Without God's help we can neither do, nor even will. A man can no more raise himself up to heaven by his own natural strength, than a stone can raise itself from the ground and fly upward. But that, which we are quite unable to do for ourselves, God is merciful enough to do for us. The Son of man was lifted up, that he might draw, or lift up all things to him. Jesus Christ, from his victorious cross, looks down on us, and stretches out the right hand of his mercy to us: if we will only lay hold of it, he will lift us up. In this way we may all get out of the slough of sin, and rise from it to holiness in this world, and to heaven hereafter. A stone may be raised above the ground, if any one will stoop to pick it up: and so may we. "What then!" do you ask,

"are we no better than stones?" Would that we were as good! For the stone makes no resistance, but quietly lets itself be lifted up: whereas we do resist God, when he would draw us up to him. We have a will which the stone has not: and that will too often strives against God's will, instead of striving with it. For this is the real difference between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous try to make God's will their will, and to do as God would have them, trusting that God of his goodness will grant them strength to do, what they cannot do of themselves. The wicked man, on the other hand, chooses to have a will of his own, and does not choose to obey God. He either gives himself no trouble at all, and leads a life of slothful self-indulgence: or, if he does take thought, it is not how to do right, but how to do wrong, in the safest and pleasantest manner. He considers how he may cheat without being found out, how he may lead some innocent girl astray,—how, in short, he may compass the particular wickedness which his heart happens to be set upon. Is not such a man worse than a stone? Would it not be easier to roll a stone up the highest hill in England, than to raise such a man out of his sins? Such a man, do I call him? rather such a corpse! A dead man is a corpse; and the wicked man is dead, dead in trespasses and sins: how then, without a miracle, is such a dead corpse to be raised to newness of life?

Such being our case,—seeing that we have no strength of ourselves to help ourselves, and all our strength and sufficiency being from God,—so gracious is God, that he has made a covenant with us by baptism, which covenant he will confirm, when you confirm your part of it. So that, when you go before the bishop, there will be a twofold confirmation. You will have to confirm the promises and vows which your godfathers and godmothers made for you at

your baptism; and God will confirm all that he promised at your baptism to do for you, provided you go to him with faith and prayer: not without. If you go, as you would to a merrymaking, or because it is the custom, without thinking well of the business you are about, without fully purposing from the bottom of your hearts to keep your promise of obeying and loving God, it will be a mere mockery of our heavenly Judge: and you will receive no benefit. But to those who really wish to do as God would have them do, —to those who really trust that God will forgive them all their past sins,—to those who earnestly pray to God to give them repentance and faith,—to all such, be assured of it, God will confirm his promises. He will forgive them, and will send them his Holy Spirit. He will give them the spirit of knowledge, that they may judge aright,—the spirit of wisdom and understanding, that they may believe aright, —the spirit of strength and godliness, that they may do aright and follow a holy course unto their lives' end. This is God's confirmation: happy they who have a part in it!

Your confirmation, on the other hand, will consist in your declaring that you assent to all that was promised in your name at your baptism, and in your undertaking to fulfil it. You are to do this by your own act and deed, by your own choice. Two roads are set before you,—the upward road, which leads to heaven,—and the downward road, which leads to hell. Two masters are bidding for your services,—God, who invites you to heaven,—and the devil, who would lure you to hell. Some master you must choose; about that there is no choice. Some way you must walk in: there is no standing still in this world. If you do not strive to mount against the stream, it will sweep you along with it. Your reason, I am sure, finds no difficulty in the choice. You are ready to cry out, "I will obey God, and

not the devil, that rebellious, that lying spirit, who seeks to ensnare and destroy me." This, I am sure, is the language of your reason. But what say your wishes? what say your lives? For, if they do the devil's will, you must be the devil's servants. Perhaps, however, you will ask, whether it be not possible to obey them both a little,—God in all those parts of duty which are easy,—and the devil in one or two wrong practices, which you are very fond of. My young friends, it is not possible. Jesus Christ himself tells us so plainly: "No man can serve two masters." God commands you to serve him with the whole of your heart: will you think of putting him off with half? If you do, he will reject you: he will have the whole, or none.

If our sovereign and country were in danger, and we were required to enlist and march to London to protect them, what would you think of a man, who would say that he had not made up his mind whether he would enlist and march or no? Would you not think he must either be a coward, or half a traitor? So will Christ think of you, if, when he calls you by his ministers to confirm the promises made in your name, that you would serve and fight under him, you delay and hold back, because you cannot make up your mind whether you will be his or no. But you have already made your choice. You are going ere long openly before the Church to renounce the devil, that cruel tyrant, whose design is to draw you away from your heavenly Father, and to make you rebels and outcasts like himself. Him therefore, and all that he tempts you to, you are going to renounce. God, and not Satan, you are going to promise, shall be your master for the time to come. You will serve the Father, who made you, the Son, who bought you with his own blood, the Holy Ghost, who offers to come and dwell in your hearts, and to make you pure and holy like himself. You mean well then, and promise fairly.

But mind: the promise must be kept. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," said the wisest man that ever lived. Give your hearts to God, while they are yet young and tender. Do not offer your first-fruits to the devil: nor think to cheat the God of heaven with the chaff and refuse of old age. Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. Watch: for you know neither the day, nor the hour, when your Master cometh. Pray without ceasing: for your strength must come from God, and from him only: and the help, which you do not think worth asking for, he will not give. The Holy Ghost, we are told, is like a lamp. As a lamp must be fed with oil, or else it will go out, so must the flames of holiness, which the Holy Ghost will kindle in your hearts, be kept alive and burning by prayer.

But you have not only a master, you have also a way to choose. There are two ways before you: one is the narrow way which leads to life; the other is the broad way, and leads to destruction. The broad way gives room for many travellers abreast. It is smooth and easy to the feet. Its hedges are full of trees, with fine-looking fruit on them, sweet to the taste and pleasant to the eye, like the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden. I will not disguise the truth from you: the ways of sin to the natural man do at first seem pleasant. But they end in destruction: the fruit is poison: whoever eats of it will either die, or grieve bitterly over his sin, and wish a thousand times he had never been guilty of it. As for companions, whoever takes that road will be sure of finding plenty of them. All the wicked, all the reprobate, all the children of the devil, the drunkard, the fornicator, the scorner, the sabbath-breaker, the dishonest, the uncharitable, the hard-hearted,—all these take the downward road. But besides these companions without, there are others that are sure to start up in a man's own

along the broad way which leads to destructio

Rather enter in at the strait gate, and take upward along the narrow way,—narrow only come over to it from the broad one, but o beginning, and easy enough of entrance to y souls by God's grace goodness is not a thi When a man is swollen and puffed up by si he finds it a hard matter to squeeze through th he can only do so by leaving his bag of vices This however cannot yet be the case with you few years since you were numbered among tho of whom Christ says, that of such is the kingdo Though no others can enter into the path of g out such pain and difficulty, that our Saviour being born again, yet as little children, we are enter into it easily. And you were little child that I doubt not you still may enter into it, an if you only strive to enter in and pray to Jesus Never mind the thorns and the rough plac meet with at first starting. Do not be discou labour of beginning to climb the hill of godline steep and narrow way. The higher you mount grow clearer, the light stronger, and your pro

cheered and braced by gales from heaven. Moreover you will be fed with angels' food. The Holy Ghost will spread out a plentiful table for you, of contented thoughts and heavenly desires, love, peace, joy, hope, comfort. These will be your supports. These will be your visitors. Do you meet with tribulations? they shall end. Have you sorrows to endure? they shall cease. For death will come, not the enemy, not the avenger, but that quiet peaceful death which receives the Christian into its arms, and carries him out of this life into a better.

And now, my dear children, I beseech the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he will grant you to be strengthened by his Spirit, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, and that you may love him and obey him unto your lives' end.

Before I conclude however let me turn for a moment to you who are older, and who were confirmed perhaps many years ago. You have already made this solemn promise. You have already declared before God and the Church, that you were determined to be God's people. Have you kept your promise? It is registered against you. You may have forgotten it: but God remembers it, and the devil remembers it. He who is now your tempter, will then be your accuser, and will urge your promise against you before the throne of Christ. Yet fear not, ye who are pious, but timid: fear not on account of your backslidings, ye who truly grieve and repent of them: fear not the malice of the adversary. Turn for mercy to your God and Saviour: throw yourselves at his feet: entreat him to forgive you, and to raise you up to a new and better life of christian holiness: and he will bear your burthens.

XLVI.

GOD'S PATIENCE, AND MAN'S PERVERSENESS.

ROMANS ii. 4, 5.

> Despisest thou the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

THIS question, I fear, is still as applicable to some in every christian congregation, as it can have been to the Romans when St. Paul asked it. Therefore it should be asked in every congregation from time to time. And what occasion can be fitter, what season more suitable for asking it, than when by God's mercy we have just been brought to the close of a year in safety, and are about to step as it were out of the old year into a new one? At such a season it cannot be ill for us,—rather must it be our duty, to halt a while and take breath, to look back over the ground we have been crossing the last twelve months, to look forward to the point we should be making for, and thus to find out whether during the last year we have indeed been travelling toward the heavenly Jerusalem, and walking on the road that leads to life. If not, if we have not been walking along the road. and walking too pretty briskly—if we have been sauntering,

or stopping, or sleeping, on our journey,—much more if we have been going backward, like some,—or have broken away from the path, like others, and have lost sight of God and heaven,—great reason shall we have to ask ourselves, why God has continued us so long in life? and what will happen to us, if we go on to the end as negligently, or as slothfully, or as crookedly, or as wrongfully, as we have been going on the last year?

Do not take it for granted, I beseech you, that you have been going on right: look carefully whether you have or not. The road of life is not a turnpike road. It is a path which every one must find out for himself, by the help of such directions as God has given us: and there are so many other paths crossing the true one in all quarters, and the wrong paths are so well beaten, and the true path in places is so faintly marked, so many persons too are always going the wrong way, and so few are walking straight along the right, that between the number of paths to puzzle him, and the number of wrong examples to lead him astray, a man, if he does not take continual heed, is in great danger of turning into a wrong path, almost without perceiving it. You know how hard it is for a stranger to find his way over the downs, especially if the evening is dark and foggy. Yet there the man is at liberty to make out the path as well as he can. No one tries to mislead him. But in the paths of life there are always plenty of companions at work to mislead the Christian; to say nothing of his own evil passions and appetites, which all pull him out of the way. One neighbour says to him, "Take this road: it is almost as straight as the other, and much pleasanter." Another says, "Take this road: it is a short cut, and will save you a world of trouble." A third says, "Walk part of the way with us for company's sake: you cannot be far wrong if you keep with us: at worst it is only crossing back into your narrow lonely path

if you don't like our way after trying it." A fourth cries to him, "What makes you so particular? Do you fancy you know the road to heaven better than anybody else? We are all going there, we hope, as well as you, though we do not make such a fuss about it." Is it a wonder that, with so many bad advisers, and bad examples to lure him astray, with so many wrong paths to puzzle him, with so many evil passions as man has naturally pulling him out of the straight and narrow path,—is it a wonder, I say, that, with all these things to lead them wrong, men should so often go wrong? It is no wonder: nay, were it not that God's word is a lantern to our feet, and a light to our path,—were it not for the Spirit of God crying to us, "This is the right way," when we turn aside to the right hand or to the left,—we should all of us go wrong always. Even as it is, with all our helps, we have too much cause to cry, We have erred and strayed from the right way like lost sheep and have gone after a multitude to do evil, and have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts, instead of walking in God's most holy laws.

Why do I remind you of these things, brethren, at the present season? In order to press upon you how necessary it is for us to stop on our journey from time to time, to look well back over the ground we have been treading, and to satisfy ourselves that we are indeed pursuing the road which leads to life. If not, if we have fallen into any evil course, if any sinful practice, any bad passion, any worldly lust has stolen upon us and grown up within us, if we have no more meekness, or kindness, or purity, or honesty, or truth, or holiness, than we had a year ago, then the question in the text should make us tremble. For be sure it is addressed to us. To us, for sinning, and continuing impenitent, and bearing so little fruit, to each of us St. Paul says now, as he said formerly to the sinners of his own time: "Despisest thou

the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? Art thou ignorant that by thy hardness and impenitent heart thou art treasuring up for thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

In this question there are three things well worth pondering: first, God's reason for sparing our lives, namely, to lead us to repentance; and the cause which moves him to desire us to repent, namely, his goodness: secondly, the return which the sinner, in the hardness and impenitence of his heart, makes to God for his goodness, namely, despising and throwing away the opportunity thus afforded him, an opportunity so precious that St. Paul calls it the *riches* of God's goodness and forbearance: thirdly, the fatal end of all this hardness and impenitence, that by it we lay up a treasure of wrath for ourselves against the day of wrath. In other words, the text teaches us three things,—that God is merciful and would have us repent,—that many men are so hardened and perverse, they will not profit by God's mercy, —and that, if we persist in rejecting God's mercy, we must abide the outpouring of his anger.

In the first place God is merciful, and would have us repent. This is the reason why he spares so many bold offenders. After death the door of penitence is closed: as the tree falls, so it must lie. Therefore he mercifully continues us in life, for the purpose of leading us to repentance,—of leading us, mind, not dragging us. It is by the cords of a man, as the prophet Hosea (xi. 4) calls them, that our heavenly Father would draw us to him. He would bring us nearer to him by our heart-strings. So he sometimes takes hold of one string, and sometimes of another, that by one or more of them he may pull us to him. At one time he tries to win us by mercies, at another to frighten

us by judgments. He is for ever teaching us by his dealings toward our neighbours and ourselves, that the truest wisdom is to fear God, that blessings are on the head of the pious and the just, that he who walketh uprightly walketh surely, that God loveth and careth for the righteous. The whole machine of his providence is at work, to prove to us that we can gain nothing by disobeying him. All the time he spares us, his eye and hand are upon us, to guide us, to loosen us from earth, to gain us over to godliness of living. Does he see us setting up some earthly idol in our hearts? He takes it away, and makes us feel that this world has nothing stable in it. Does he see us indulging in forbidden pleasures? He makes us taste their bitterness and gall. So with regard to every other sin, which can ensnare the heart of man, he takes care to order matters in such wise, that we shall often be baffled, that the trouble of pursuit, even when we do succeed, is greater than the thing is worth, and that the end is always weariness and vexation, generally disgust, never perfect calm, hearty satisfaction. "The wicked eat, but have not enough; while they who fear the Lord are at peace." Moreover while he is thus working on the understanding of the sinner, to convince him that the ways of sin are the ways of folly, God often begins to work on his fears. He lays him low on a bed of sickness, and sends death to look him in the face, and to whisper in his ear, Condemnation! At the same time he carries some passage of Scripture, which speaks of God's mercy and forbearance, and of the death of Christ who died for all, that all might turn to God and live,—some great truth of this kind will God take care to aim right at the trembling sinner's heart, if so be that love and gratitude may move him.

Now if we ask, why God, who is a righteous judge and strong, is also patient, although we are provoking him daily, if we ask why he does not pluck his right hand out of his

bosom to sweep his enemies clean away,—St. Paul tells us in the text, Because his goodness would lead them to repentance. Does it ever fail of this blessed effect? Can God be good and merciful in vain? Alas! many are so hardened and headstrong, that they will not profit by God's mercy. In vain he teaches, in vain he chastens, in vain he calls to them. They despise the riches of his goodness. When I say they despise him, I do not mean that they are mad enough to declare that they despise God, and to set him at defiance. But they do not regard him or his dealings with them; they shut him out of their tongues: they leave him out of their plans: they go on just as if there was no God, no judgment to come, no place of torment for the impenitent. This practical disregard for their Maker and King in the language of the Bible is despising God. So let none deceive himself by saying, "This cannot apply to me: for I have never meant to despise God." The question is not, what you have meant, but what you have done. Have you ever thought seriously of God's goodness to you, in not cutting you off, as he might do any day, in the midst of your sins? Have you ever considered why he prolongs that life and strength, which you are making so bad a use of? Why does he continue to you the power of speech, instead of striking you dumb for cursing and swearing and using so many bad and filthy words? Why does he continue to you the power of thought, when you so rarely, if ever, think of him? Why, in a word, when he sees you sinning so zealously with heart and mind, and eyes and ears, and in short with all your members,—why does he continue to you the full and free enjoyment of all those members and faculties, which you are so ungratefully, so impiously misusing? Have you ever thought of the reason why God has had all this patience with you? that it is to lead you to repentance. If you have never thought of these things, if

on the contrary, you are saying within yourself, "Oh! I have plenty of time before me; I am young and strong: time enough to think of another world, when I begin to tire of this:"—then to you is this word spoken. Whether you mean it or not, you are verily guilty of despising the goodness and forbearance of your God. Can any guilt well be greater? It is not a small thing that you are despising; no; it is riches, the best riches, the riches of the mercy of the King of heaven. It is easy to see why St. Paul calls it riches. He would teach us the excellence of this mercy, which is so great, that, if we only knew the true value of things, we should fall on our knees, and bless God with all our hearts for sparing us month after month, and year after year, that we may have time and opportunities for repentance.

But what if the opportunities are given in vain? What if the time, which should have been spent in repentance has been employed in heaping sin upon sin? What if December leave us as far from heaven as January found us, but with a heavier load on our consciences, and a deeper stain on our souls? Then I must set before you the evil end of such a life of sin, the evil end of going on year after year despising the riches of God's goodness and forbearance. The wages of sin is death. The end of rejecting God's mercy must be to abide the fierceness of his anger, in that day when the Son of Man comes in all his Father's glory to execute judgment on the wicked. Against that day, St. Paul tells us in the text, hardened and impenitent sinners are treasuring up for themselves wrath. Pray mark the word; for it is a very striking one: a treasure of wrath! As if St. Paul had said, "If ye will not profit by the riches of God's mercy, God has riches of another sort in store for you, the riches, the overflowings of his wrath." Let no man be mad enough to say within himself, I will lay up my treasure upon earth: for we must all lay up treasure in heaven, whether

we will or no. We are all laying up treasure there at this moment; if it be not a treasure of holiness, it must be a treasure of wrath. Could our eyes be opened to behold the secrets of the next world, how should we start and tremble at seeing this mountain of wrath and misery and punishment, which we are heaping up against ourselves. The covetous muckworm for instance, who scrapes up penny upon penny, and pound upon pound, by so many base, dishonest, oppressive ways,—how would he shudder to find the treasure he delights in, a treasure not of money, but of wrath! The drunkard, who wallows in strong drink,—it might rouse even him from his deadly lethargy, could he see every cup of drunkenness swelling a stream of wrath for him. The unclean man, who offends the holy Spirit of God by his adultery, his fornication, his impure thoughts, and filthy words,—what would be his feelings, if he saw the pile of flaming wrath, which his pleasures, as he deems them, are rapidly raising against him! But so it is, whether we see it or not. We have the apostle's word for it: the joys of sin are joys of wrath; the wages of sin are wages of wrath: the treasures of sin are treasures of wrath, and vengeance, and punishment, and misery and woe.

Brethren, is it worth our while, for such treasures as these, to slight and throw away the riches of God's mercy, the riches of Christ's prayers, the riches of the graces of the Holy Spirit? These last may be yours, if you will have them. God is not niggardly of his gifts and blessings. He presses his offers of forgiveness upon sinners. He holds out his royal pardon to them, if they will only leave their sins, and come to him, and take it. Remember what he says of himself in the prophet Isaiah (lxv. 2): "I have spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people." Though his people were rebellious, yet he ceased not throughout that day to stretch out his hands to them, and beckon to them.

So does he beckon to us too: but it is only through the day, the day of grace. If we hearken not to his invitations during that day, the call ceases: the hand which would have led us to repentance, is withdrawn: we are given over, possibly even in this world, to a reprobate mind, certainly in the next world to punishment everlasting. Turn, then, I beseech you, while the day of grace is still open to you. Let the time past suffice us to have spent in sin; and let us endeavour to redeem the time that still remains to us. Let us bury our ungodliness, our unrighteousness, our transgressions and sins of every kind, in the grave of the departing year: and with a new year let us begin a new and spiritual life,—a life not merely of human virtue, but of christian holiness and obedience.

For to this we are called. Christ did not give us his perfect example,—he did not preach his divine sermon,—he did not leave us so many promises and warnings, so many beautiful and touching parables, so many lessons of every kind,—he did not purchase for us the gift of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter,—merely to make us what the world calls decent and respectable. The better of the heathens were as good as that, ages before Christ's coming. If we, with all our greater advantages, do not soar much nearer to heaven, Jesus Christ has lived for us and taught us in vain. He came to make us a holy nation, a peculiar people, children of God in heart and spirit. He came not merely to reconcile, but also to reunite us to the Father. Until he has done this for each of us,—until he has raised and lifted us up from common human virtue to godliness,—until he has changed our natural worldly views and motives into spiritual thoughts and heavenly desires,—his work in us is not accomplished. Until he has sown the seeds of this blessed change in us, his work in us is not begun. We may be good heathens, or good Jews, but

we cannot be Christians, unless we are Christ's people. And how can we be Christ's people, unless we have something of Christ's spirit in us? I say, *something* of the same spirit. I do not say that you will ever attain to the fullness of his Spirit, though ye ought to pray and strive to do so; as St. Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. But I do tell you, that you can and must attain to a portion of Christ's spirit: else you are none of Christ's. We must be golden, as he was golden: and then, though our holiness be no more comparable to his, than the smallest gold coin is comparable to the mines of Ophir, still we are of the same metal, and his riches will make up for our poorness, and he will present us as an offering to our Father and our God. But if we are not of the right metal, we are mere counterfeits; and then what can the name of Christian avail us in the day of judgment? Many a bad sovereign professes to bear the king's image and superscription, and yet may not be worth so much as a good shilling. So will it be with the bad Christian. In spite of his having been baptized in the name of Christ, a good heathen is far more pleasing in the sight of God.

To those among you therefore, my brethren, who are still in your sins, I say, depart from iniquity; cease to do evil; leave off your evil courses; and turn to God in penitence and prayer. Is any present, who has been tempted to indulge in strong drink? To him, I say, refrain from it; keep away from the public-house, from the beer-shop: give up your jovial companions: they may laugh at you for it; but never mind that laugh, so long as you feel that Christ is smiling on you, and that the angels are rejoicing over you. Has any been tempted to leave the path of truth? To him I say, put away lying, and speak the truth in everything to your neighbour. Is any dishonest? To him I say, steal no more; keep your hands from your neighbour's property;

take no advantage of his ignorance, or of his necessities; deal justly and fairly by him in everything. If there be any present, who have hitherto contented themselves with being what the world calls good sort of men, to them I say, remember that the Gospel requires holiness of you. Strive therefore to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour: strive to become Christians in reality, as well as in profession: seek to obtain that spirit of Christ, which is never refused to fervent prayer, and the study of the word of God. Lastly, to those who have already set their faces toward the heavenly city, and whose hearts bear them joyful testimony that they have begun to take the law of God for their rule of life,—to those what need be said, but that they pray more earnestly, trust more entirely, love with greater warmth of heart, and greater purity of soul? Let this be the matter of your prayers, that, as God has begun his good work in you, he will bring the same to full effect, and that, as you have already received how you ought to walk and to please God, you may abound in the same more and more, so that every succeeding year, as it passes along with you, may bring you nearer to God, and may ripen you more and more for heaven.

THE END.

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